SHORT STORIES

No. 758.] Week ending July 11th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

THE FUGITIVE CROUCHED DOWN BEHIND THE CANVAS WHILE SADIE DENIED HIS PRESENCE TO THE WARDER.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story "Won Without Wooing." See inside.)

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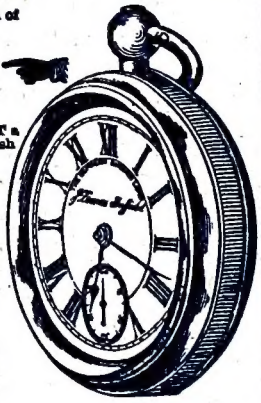

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PUNCTURE

SHORT STORIES

No. 758.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending July 11th, 1903.

WON WITHOUT WOOING.

A Summer Afternoon Episode in which a Houseboat, a Pretty Australian Girl, the Law, and Two Young Englishmen, Play Parts.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

"Now, see here, Sadie, you know me. When I say a thing's got to be, it's got to be. Your old dad don't want to be angry with you, but he's fixed up his plans and they can't be interfered with. So you get that little word said this afternoon to the Honourable Mark, and then I can arrange the financial side of the business and make a move for Melbourne, where I ought to have been a week ago."

"And suppose the Honourable Mark doesn't ask me?"

Sadie Leland sat back among the cushions of her wicker lounge-chair, put her hands behind her proud young head, and looked at her father. One of her small feet, dainty in their low white shoes, tapped the snowy deck of the smart modern houseboat.

There was an English viscount's coronet over the crest on the stern of the flat, broad vessel, and on that of the trim steam-launch in waiting, but the flag of an Australian colony flew from the flag-staffs of both, in compliment to the country whence Mr. Peter Leland, of Melbourne and Sydney, had brought the wherewithal to rent the two craft from their noble owner.

Peter Leland coughed. He was a short, bluff, clean-shaven Colonial. His deep jaw and the habitual twinkle in his grey eye spoke of mingled good humour and obstinacy.

"Well," his daughter was told bluntly, "I fancy Lady Jane has attended to that. At all events, she helped me pack everybody else off fishing or punting, or doing something equally unnecessary, and she herself is coming with me in the launch to—to—ahem!—to see a little riverside place I am thinking of taking. You have a slight headache and prefer to read, Abington is writing letters, I believe. Once we clear off, he'll probably pop out and improve the shining hour."

Sadie rose and began to put her father's tie straight with caressing fingers.

"Dad," she said, "where's the hurry? Let me come with you and Lady Jane, I don't want to tie myself up yet. Why should you go home just now? Can't Mr. Merivale go?—it wouldn't be the first time he'd settled things 'down under' as well as you could yourself."

Peter Leland had suddenly become very interested in the set of his trouser-legs over his boot-tops.

"There are some things," he answered evasively, "a man can't trust the best secretary on earth to do for him. And, besides, Merivale isn't my secretary any longer."

His daughter stared. "Mr. Merivale not your secretary any longer?" she repeated slowly. "Oh, dad, what has happened?"

The Australian flushed. "Oh, well," he said, "it's a roundabout story, Sadie, and it wouldn't interest you. Leastways, it oughtn't to. Richard Merivale was only a promising young chap I gave a chance to, and—and, well, I'm disappointed in him. Don't you waste another thought on him."

He put his daughter gently into the chair from which she had risen and stood looking at her.

"Sadie," he added, "you understand me, there is to be no fooling about this business of Abington's. I've given you every help to get fond of him on your own. After all, you're your mother's child and she was as sentimental as a yellow-back novel, bless her. But sense or sentiment, it's got to be. Abington is young, smart, well-bred, and the next heir to a title. He's a cheap lot, from my point of view, and he's dead nuts on you."

Sadie Leland frowned. "Yes," she retorted, "he'd rather have me with three hundred thousand than anyone else with four. But won't you please tell me about Mr. Merivale. I thought he was only detained in town on business."

She met keenly her father's shifting glance. "Dad," she said, "you spoke of being disappointed in Mr. Merivale. What did you mean? You must be mistaken; I don't believe Mr. Merivale——"

Peter Leland interrupted her. "Another time, Sadie," he replied, hastily; "here is Lady Jane, come, I'll be bound, from a quiet palaver with her Honourable nephew. Ta-ta, Sadie."

He nodded significantly to his daughter and hurried off along the deck, to hand down into the waiting launch a tall and somewhat angular person in a spotted foulard gown and severely plain hat.

Lady Jane Abington—as her "style" and bearing showed—belonged to an old school of English gentlewomen, and it was well understood in Society that she only consented to introduce the Lelands into that magic circle for the sake of her nephew's interest in the pretty Sadie.

The Abingtons, however, if an ancient and exclusive family, were an increasingly impecunious one, and though Mark

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Abington was separated merely by a single ailing life from a historic title, he had not been snapped at in the marriage market. Possibly he had not wished to settle down; in his time he had been reputed more than a trifle "wild," and it was whispered that his mother's small fortune had been swallowed up at his majority by gambling debts and other dubious claims.

But years and necessity had moderated his extravagances, and Lady Jane herself, the impecunious widow of a needy peer, had hailed with genuine pleasure the chance of assisting him in a good match—good for the Honourable Mark Abington, good for the family whose wealth and influence had been on the wane for so many generations.

Sadie glanced after the launch as it sped away down the river in the yellow haze of the summer afternoon, her chaperon's white tulle parasol conspicuous in the stern-sheets beside the Colonial's Panama. Sadie heaved an abstracted sigh, for she did not dislike the stiff, lonely Englishwoman.

"Poor Lady Jane," she observed aloud, "I wonder if she was ever really happy, if she ever knew what it was to have a heart. And yet she was an earl's daughter. Heigho!"

"A very poverty-stricken earldom, I assure you," said a slow, amused, slightly harsh voice. Sadie started. A typical man-about-town—heavily built, heavily moustached, scrupulously groomed, a little lethargic in his movements, Mark Abington had come out unperceived upon the deck, to overhear and answer her self-communing. She blushed.

"I—I ought to beg your pardon, Mr. Abington," she began. But Mark Abington checked her with a gesture.

"Not at all," he said, sitting down near her; "like yourself, I have the habit of dissecting people, my own relations not excepted. As for Lady Jane, I doubt if she knows what happiness, in your sense of the word, means. She is a wheel in the English social system, that is enough for her."

Sadie smiled gravely. Mark Abington was not without a kind of cleverness; his talk, cynical, crisp, and often daring, seldom failed to interest her quick wits.

"May I smoke?" he asked. Sadie nodded. As he took out his cigar-case and lit a fragrant Muria, she studied him with a certain keen, almost painful attention. He was polished, tactful, experienced, well-bred, still young, and the bluest of blue blood ran in his veins. What girl would not be responsive in some degree to the presence of such a suitor? Even Sadie could not deny him distinction and good looks.

Mark Abington blew out his vesta and threw it over one of the canvas rail-screens that inclosed the deck into the river. He himself was studying Sadie.

Shrewd, gay, red-lipped, dark-haired and dark-skinned, yet with the clear, fine complexion of a true brunette beauty, and a slender elasticity all her own. Sadie Leland, her father's fortune apart, was just the woman to fascinate the selfish, sensuous, world-weary man at her side.

His glance dwelt upon her with cold, yet profound passion, and she felt it, as women do feel such things, without analysing it. Perhaps it is better so.

"Yes," went on Mark Abington, withdrawing his cigar from his lips; "Lady Jane is rather terrible, isn't she? But she doesn't suffer from having no heart; what troubles her is having too many nerves. I am afraid I helped to shatter a fairly large selection of them in my time. My mater died when I was at Harrow and she's been a sort of step-mamma to me for years."

"A pretty trying post, I fancy, where you were concerned," said Sadie Leland, drily.

"I daresay it was," admitted her companion, "for, to tell you a secret, Miss Leland, though I am as easily to be led as the proverbial lamb, nothing on earth can drive me. Small wonder that my aunt failed where—where another woman might have succeeded."

Sadie's pulses beat a stroke or two quicker. The tone in which the last words had been spoken was noticeably serious. With great deftness Mark Abington had turned the conversation into a tell-tale channel.

"I suppose," he continued, "that I *have* been rather a rolling-stone. But, do you know, Miss Leland, it's been as much bad luck as anything else. If I had only happened to meet some clever, charming woman—like—like you, I believe I should have settled down with the best will in the world."

He had leant forward, and though he was talking with more tact than fervour, his voice had gained a note which could not be mistaken. It was not only fortune that made her a desirable possession; she had beauty and youth and their flower had captivated his sensuous, selfish spirit.

"It isn't very fashionable to fall in love nowadays," he added; "but the most hardened bachelor may meet his fate at last and I have met mine."

His fingers sought her own. "Sadie," he said, "can't you see, don't you understand? I love you!"

Sadie Leland did not answer. Her eyes were fixed apparently upon vacancy, and she swayed slightly as she sat in the wicker-lounge-chair. Suddenly she drew a long breath and put her hand to her side.

Mark Abington's brows contracted. Her set, white face was more of a rebuff than any words could have been. Yet the abruptness of the change in her demeanour vaguely alarmed him.

"Sadie," he exclaimed; "Miss Leland, you are not well—you——"

"No—," was the faltered answer; "I—I feel very faint. I shall be better in a moment."

The colour was coming back to her cheeks, but their pallor was still almost ghastly. Mark Abington started up.

"I will get you a little brandy-and-water," he said, "it is the heat. And I—I surprised you, confound my clumsiness." And he hurried down the covered staircase that led to the saloon below.

As he disappeared, Sadie Leland rose, tottered to the rail near where she had been sitting, and bent her gaze upon the species of lush green hedgerow that fringed the bank by which the houseboat was moored. She passed a hand across her eyes.

"Was it," she murmured aloud, "was it a kind of dream? It couldn't really have been—been *he!*"

Even while she spoke there was a crackling of the underwood by the deserted pathway and a head was thrust out from among the foliage. A stalwart frame followed it.

The new-comer was young and personable, yet hatless, haggard and dishevelled. His wrists were fettered by a pair of bright steel handcuffs. Sadie Leland uttered a low, almost inaudible cry and recoiled into the shelter of the staircase down which Mark Abington had just vanished.

An instant the fettered figure stood surveying the scene, crouched into a low recess beneath a flight of open wooden steps that connected the upper deck with the stern of the vessel. From this haven he peered out cautiously, and finally as though dissatisfied with the concealment it afforded, stole swiftly up the steps themselves to hide in an angle of the canvas-covered railing that fenced the deck above.

Scarcely had his head dropped below the line of sight than the foliage on the bank was parted and a couple of men in a blue, semi-military uniform stepped out.

As the fugitive had done, they looked up and down the bank, one of them moving along it towards a point from which he might have gained, through the gateway at the head of the steps, a view of the hidden man. Instinctively Sadie Leland sprang forward, and gliding before the crouching figure.

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stood looking at the blue-coated functionaries. The leader saluted her respectfully.

"Excuse me, miss," he said, "but do you happen to have seen anyone run along the bank? We're warders from Brixtow Prison and we were taking a remand prisoner over there for the assizes, when he gave us the slip at the station up yonder. We chased him this far and lost him."

The girl on the deck of the house-boat shook her head. "N—no," she replied, clearly answering the question with literal accuracy—"no one."

The warder saluted again, thanked her, and plunged back into the thicket with his companion. Sadie turned and glanced down at the crouching man.

"Mr.—Mr. Merivale," she faltered; "you—like this!"

The other straightened himself up unsteadily; he had pleasant blue eyes—eyes in which there was no shame, only acute sadness.

"I am innocent," he said, "but what is that to you?" He hesitated, and his sensitive, clean-shaven lips trembled. "Thank you for that kind lie," he added, "I am sorry I put you to it—I did not dream of finding you here."

Sadie did not reply. Instead she sprang in front of him, pushing him back into the covered stairway of the saloon. "Go down," she bade him imperiously.

He obeyed. A glance had shown him that the leader of the warders was emerging again from the thicket. Sadie went to the side and stood unconcernedly.

The man paused awhile with a puzzled air, then came to look over the river-bank and to scan its margin critically. After a few seconds of futile reflection he roused himself and departed, shrugging his shoulders. Sadie heaved a sigh of relief and turned to descend the saloon stairs. Half-way down she was arrested by a singular sight.

In the entrance of the saloon, and just visible from the curve in the narrow stairs that Sadie had reached, was Mark Abington. At his feet lay a broken glass, from which the brandy-and-water he had been to fetch had spattered the floor of the short corridor. His eyes were starting, and his mouth was agape as he confronted the dishevelled and hand-cuffed new-comer. Some words burst from his lips and reached the ears of Sadie Leland, words spoken in a husky, shaking whisper.

"Merivale! What—what do you want with me?"

There was a ring of superstitious dread in the broken syllables. They were answered by a low, fierce laugh from the fettered man.

"I'm no ghost," he said, "though your conscience makes you think me one. I have escaped from the gaol—or, rather, from the gaolers to whom your dupe, Mr. Leland, consigned me. Liar and coward! Oh, if I were not chained!"

Sadie heard him grind his teeth in a passion of impotent indignation; she had drawn back up the staircase and stood listening, a hard, shrewd light in her girlish face.

Mark Abington pulled himself together, glancing at the broken glass by his feet.

"Escaped!" he repeated. "Escaped! And you come here to threaten me with the badge of your imprisonment upon you. A discreet proceeding, truly! I have but to give the alarm and you will be seized and detained till the police can be sent for to re-arrest you—under her eyes, for she herself is here."

Richard Merivale took him suddenly by the throat with his chained hands.

"You hound!" he said; "now I am sure that you put the notes in my pocket yourself. You read my secret, you were jealous of my nearness to her, of her simple kindness to me. You laid a fiendish trap and you triumphed. But you shall not taunt me and go unmarked."

He grasped his struggling prey and shook him like a rat.

Mark Abington closed with his antagonist and tried to throw him, calling in a hoarse whisper for assistance. But he was no match for Richard Merivale—indolence and good living had overweighted and handicapped his once athletic frame.

There was hot coloured blood in Sadie Leland's veins—it had stolen into her cheeks, and was glittering in her eyes. She crept down the staircase a pace or two more, and stood peering round the sheltering curve.

"Let me go," gasped the half-strangled man in the thin, breathless syllables that were all he could compass. "I'll give you money, money, to get away with—it's your only chance. You—you can't hope to prove your innocence. And, after all, you could never have married her."

His voice grew fainter. "Great Heavens," he whispered, "you won't kill me; you—you——" Speech failed him; he could say no more.

"Why not?" demanded Merivale, for a cold ferocity had taken possession of him; "you did worse than kill me. Why not, I say?"

Sadie Leland roused from her quiescence to glide down the stair and lay a soft hand on the shoulder of Richard Merivale.

"You need not kill him," she said. "I have heard everything. I am your witness before the law and the world."

* * * * *

And that is why Peter Leland did not come back to find his daughter betrothed to the husband of his choice. Instead, to his profound bewilderment, he discovered his late secretary seated composedly in the dining-saloon over a dainty high tea, in which cold chicken figured conspicuously.

Naturally, being still hand-cuffed—for the official form of fetter is not a thing to be easily tampered with—Richard Merivale could not feed himself with overmuch grace, but Sadie, busily making the delicate white meat into sandwiches, did not seem to mind.

The Colonial gazed incredulously at this amazing picture, and blinked deliberately several times. Sadie went to him.

"Dad," she said, "it is Mr. Merivale himself. He has escaped, as you see, and is very hungry."

Peter Leland choked down his astonishment. He was too disconcerted to inquire by what means Richard Merivale had installed himself upon the house-boat.

"Sadie," he stammered, "I—I—we kept it from you, Abington and I, thinking it best. But that fellow there is a thief. He robbed your—your future husband of three or four hundred pounds in notes, about a fortnight ago, before we left town to come here. Mark was for letting him go, but I swore, after all I'd done for him, he should be gaoled for it. Don't you contaminate yourself by going near him."

Sadie's answer was to refill the fettered man's cup and deliver it to him with a bewitching bow.

"Go slow, dad," she retorted. "I overheard the dishonourable Mark talking to Mr. Merivale when he thought they were quite alone; they had tumbled across one another down here when I was up on deck, throwing dust in the eyes of the gentlemen from the gaol. I suppose you'll take my word for what I gathered?"

"Why—why, certainly," said the Colonial; "you can't do one thing, Sadie, and that's lie. But——"

His daughter came to him, flushing slightly. "Mr. Abington put the notes in Mr. Merivale's pocket," she explained.

"Great Scott!" cried Peter Leland. "But what on earth did he want to do that trick for?"

"That's what you won't have to ask too many questions about just now, papa," said Sadie sweetly. "I—I could make you understand it all much better

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alone. What you've got to do at present is to get these horrid hand-cuffs off Mr. Merivale and arrange things so he won't be carried off to prison any more."

The Australian looked at his ex-secretary. "So, Merivale," he observed drily, "it seems I've been spoofed. But why didn't you speak out man? It was your silence that made things so black."

Richard Merivale's fettered hands trifled nervously with each other.

"Mr. Abington had guessed a secret of mine," he said; "a—a secret that wasn't quite unconnected with Sadie—with Miss Leland. That was why he tried to ruin me. It was a clever plan, that of putting his notes into my coat-pocket and leaving his pocket-book on my desk. He knew that I should see it and return it to him. To 'miss' the notes, accuse me of abstracting them, and have me searched, was simplicity itself."

"The mean hound!" ejaculated Leland warmly.

Richard Merivale continued with a certain embarrassment: "I could prove nothing," he added; "as Mr. Abington told me in Miss Leland's hearing, and, besides, I thought that she cared for him. So I held my tongue. Had she not been a witness to his taunts and attempted bribery this afternoon, I should never have hoped for vindication. But liberty was sweet, and I made a dash for it, my second since my arrest—hence these hand-cuffs."

The Colonial frowned. "Why should Abington be jealous of you," he queried; "I could have told him that any time in the last two years you would have given your eyes out of your head for a smile from Sadie here. But I knew you didn't flatter yourself it could come to more than respectful admiration. Abington's got a lot of dirty work to do if he means to ruin every man who's sweet on Sadie."

Sadie put her head on one side and peeped saucily at her father.

"Perhaps Mr. Abington guessed more than a single secret, dad," she said softly; "perhaps he guessed a secret of mine—a secret that I had scarcely dared to guess myself."

Peter Leland started. "Sadie!" he exclaimed. "Richard!"

Sadie put her hand over the Australian's mouth.

"Papa," she said, "they used to call you Peter the Just at home. Mr. Merivale is an honest man, yet he is still hand-cuffed, and the police are looking for him. Don't you think that is the first thing to attend to?"

Her father took up his hat. "You're right, Sadie," he admitted reluctantly. "I'll go to the police-station at once."

His daughter turned to touch Richard Merivale's fettered fingers with a shy, maidenly tenderness.

"Will anything ever console you for the shame of it all?" she murmured. Merivale managed to clasp her hand.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it proved to have been worth it," he replied sententiously. And it did.

But Lady Jane will never quite understand what happened during that momentous afternoon, an afternoon which, for Mark Abington, included also a trying interview with Peter Leland and a hurried trip to town in the Colonial's charge.

More than one high police authority within the next two hours listened with polite contempt to his confused explanation and withdrawal of the accusation against Richard Merivale.

It had been too hastily made, he faltered, with the Australian's stern eye upon him, probably the notes were loose in the pocket-book instead, as he had thought at first, in an inner compartment. That being so, they might easily have slipped out into the secretary's pocket when he placed the book there for delivery to its owner. On reflection he regretted the precipitation with which he had come to a conclusion detrimental to Mr. Merivale's honour.

When Sadie Leland was married to her father's penniless secretary, Mark Abington was lost in amazement.

"And that is the little fool who rejected you, Mark!" Lady Jane exclaimed to her nephew. But Mark Abington only growled.

R. Norman Silver.

A STORY IN LETTERS.

Telling of the Decline of a Love Affair.

New Eden, Feb. 10, 1903.

My Angel,—I am in Paradise! The thought of you is a constant source of delight. I never knew what it was to be happy before; but now the whole world is running over with joy. Everything speaks to me of *you!* Since we parted I have seen your face everywhere—in dreams, in the sky, in the trees, in the flowers. The birds sing your name, and the wind whispers it in the grass. Oh, my darling, I have found Heaven at last, and you have led me into it. How I long to hear your voice again, to look into your eyes, to clasp your hand. Believe me, there is not a moment of the day when your image is not in my thoughts. How shall I manage to exist until we meet again? Do you think of me always, love, as I think of you? I know you do. And now farewell for a few hours. A thousand kisses, sweet! Do not fail to answer all my letters promptly.—Your devoted, faithful lover,

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 12, 1903.

Sweetest,—I have just received your letter—the very breath of your presence in it, the delicate perfume of violets! How good of you to write so soon. I dreamt of you all last night, and I am dreaming of you now. The fellows laugh at me for my absentmindedness. What do I care? I have something better to think of than logarithms and Greek roots. But I must study a bit, I suppose, or our secret will be suspected. So, good-bye, for now. I nclosie a leaf from the inmost heart of a rose. Kiss it for me, as I have kissed it for you.—For ever, your

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 15, 1903.

Darling,—You are too unkind. I know that I have missed a day; but examinations are close at hand, and those two weeks, while we were finding our Heaven, have made such a gap in my work. You say that I love you less than "my nasty old books." That is just like a girl. Why can't your sex have a little common-sense? But there goes the bell.—Hastily,

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 20, 1903.

My Dear Jessie,—Why can't you keep your temper? I have not been lecturing you, and I have not neglected you. One charge refutes the other. I simply asked you to have a little charitable common-sense, in view of the hard work that is crowding on me just now. Of course, I am just as fond of you as ever I was; but I can't write love-letters and grind mathematics at the same time, and no reasonable girl would expect it. You know that I love you. Why should you insist upon my repeating it every *single* day?—Lovingly,

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 25, 1903.

My Dear Miss Northcote,—I am sorry you feel as you do. I thought you truly loved me. Love is always willing to make sacrifices. Besides, a man cannot give up his *whole* time to sentiment. It is different with women. This is a fact which you do not seem to have taken into consideration at all. I shall have more time after the present week, and will write you at length my views upon this subject. Then, perhaps, you can consistently claim that I am lecturing you!—Ever sincerely,

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 27, 1903.

Miss Northcote, Dear Madam,—I beg to acknowledge receipt by Parcel Post of the package containing ring, letters, photograph, etc. I return, also by same means, like articles of yours in my possession. Kindly acknowledge upon delivery, and oblige, yours respectfully,

Clarence Murchison.

Gerald Harward.

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TOBY'S RIVAL.

Telling of a Union Between Youth and Antiquity.

The girl felt a drop of rain on her nose. She looked down hastily at her frock, and saw three audacious rain-drops settle on it. Her thoughts flew to her big picture-hat. Overhead huge black clouds gathered threateningly.

She was wearing her smartest and prettiest summer costume, and her umbrella was neatly folded up in the hall-stand at home.

When one finds oneself in such a position, the hospitality of a near neighbour becomes the most valuable thing in the world. So the girl caught up her light skirt with both hands, and ran down the road until she came to the gate of the Crib, where she turned in.

Flushed and breathless, she shot past the drawing-room windows. A man sat in the shadow of the curtains with his arm over the back of a chair. She saw the colour of his sleeve, and on this slight evidence, turned her smiling face towards him and nodded as to an old friend.

"Toby Atkinson," she thought in the porch. "how often have I advised him to give up wearing those horrid checks."

As she followed the housemaid across the hall she carefully flecked the rain-drops off her sleeve, and tilted her hat to the proper angle.

Delighted greetings met her in the doorway, for the girl was a cheerful creature, and much beloved by her friends. Toby stood by the window immovable, and quite unusually silent, and she half turned to greet him.

"Ah!" she said over her shoulder, "there you are again in that fright of a coat!"

There was no response. Thinking he had feigned offence, she turned an amused smile on him and met the astonished gaze of the gravest and most melancholy grey eyes she had ever seen in her life.

The girl gave a little start of horror. The coat might certainly have been Toby's, but the wearer of it was very different. In height he was well over six feet, and his iron-grey hair, and pale, handsome, almost severe face, were in lively contrast to Toby's youthfulness and exuberance. An introduction quickly followed, and she sat down on a low chair in the window.

The rain was falling heavily now, and although the girl was by no means an easily discomfited person, she was glad to follow the frolics of the weather with her eyes for a few moments. So this was how she and the man of learning met.

They did not seem destined to give each other much pleasure for some time. The girl rapidly recovered her equilibrium, and sat on the edge of her chair looking quite ready to enjoy herself if only she might.

The man of learning, as grim and grey as his college walls, gazed straight before him, and maintained a heavy silence. He was not used to the society of such careless, happy-looking beings, and was, in truth, somewhat alarmed.

The girl shot quizzical little glances at him once or twice from under the curves of her hat.

"Rather handsome," she decided quickly. "Not really stern, I should think. Good mouth and chin, and I like the cut of his boots."

This was as far as her conjectures led her at present, and she wished he would speak. She could not bring herself to begin a conversation with him, while he looked as if nothing short of an earthquake would make him open his mouth, or turn his gaze from the opposite wall to her.

The ripple of laughter and chat that ran through the room only reached her in fascinating snatches. She was too far off to join in it. A white-haired lady crocheting on a not very distant sofa, sometimes made purring remarks to the cat curled up on the cushion beside her, but took no notice of anyone else.

At last the girl essayed a couple of gentle remarks across to her, and tried to include the man of learning in them. But her soft appeals were all in vain. He never moved a muscle. He didn't in the least know what to say to her.

"Oh, dear!" she thought, with a little sigh. "I think I know now what Robinson Crusoe felt like before Friday came. Toby, dear, I'm very sorry I ever took such a creature for you!"

"One, two, three," murmured the white-haired old lady over her needles.

"One—two—three. Now, ought I to slip one, or lift one?" The man of learning crossed his legs.

"I declare, he's alive after all!" thought the girl.

"I have observed," he said, turning slightly to her, "that your neighbourhood is exceeding rich in archæological remains."

"Yes, indeed," was all she could find to say, but she thought, "If he looks like that at me much longer I shall bolt."

"No doubt you make a deep study of them?"

"Well, no, I'm afraid I don't. You see"—his grave eyes demanded an answer—"I—I—haven't time," with sudden relief.

"Yet you live on classic ground," he said severely.

The girl laughed outright, and was so pleased with herself for laughing under those tragic eyes that she laughed again. He wondered vaguely when he had heard a sound like that before.

"I've a great mind not to talk to him at all," she thought. "What does he go on like this for?" But it had never been her habit to remain silent for long at a time, and presently she spoke.

"I don't think it matters what kind of ground one lives on," she said serenely, "so long as one has a good time. I couldn't endure messing about among those horrid old things. I imagine people who do, just get as musty and fusty themselves. But I don't know any of them, and I don't think I want to."

She leant back in her chair without the slightest suspicion that she was talking to one of the foremost antiquarians of

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the day. Of one of his peculiarities she was equally ignorant.

Although an abnormally shy and silent man, and the despair of his hostess on any rare occasion that he ventured into society, he had been known when touched on his own particular subject to begin at ten o'clock, and continue talking till midnight.

He turned to her now, and, without in the least knowing that he was doing anything unusual, poured out a volley of antiquarian lore in his low, monotonous voice. He gave her a learned disquisition on the Græco-Roman style, and warming up to his subject, turned to the history of Anglo-Norman fortifications, and flooded her with terms she had never heard before.

She tried to scramble after him when he talked of barbican and portcullis, drawbridge, donjon and moat, but she felt as much out of it as if she had been drowned in the lowest depths of the one, or securely locked up in the other.

"Is he paid for this kind of thing?" she thought irritably. "Does he get his living by befogging people like this? I do wish it would stop raining."

Silence fell at last. The man of learning gazed dreamily out of the window, lost in thought.

"I won't speak a single word to him," she said to herself eagerly. "The probabilities are he would start again."

Five minutes passed. It got monotonous to watch the rain clearing off, and she stole a cautious glance at him. He sat in exactly the same position, his thoughts absorbed and far away.

"I believe he has forgotten my very existence!" she thought indignantly. It was too much. She coughed slightly. No use. Then she began in a small voice:

"The picnic is to be in the Abbey ruins, I believe?" This was a safe remark. It bore clearly on the subject, and lay well within her own range of knowledge. He caught the word "Abbey," and burst forth afresh.

Again the girl was assailed with a torrent of technicalities. Her brain reeled in a maze of lights and traceries, cross-vaults and flying buttresses, arches and pinnacles, and all the paraphernalia of Gothic architecture.

His life had been that of the solitary student and scholar, and his vocabulary was as unintelligible to her as her dress-maker's would have been to him.

At the end of fifteen minutes the girl rose and shook out her flounces.

"Do you see that cat?" she said, pointing to the innocent pussy asleep on the sofa. "It knows just as much about what you're talking of as I do!"

If the man of learning had been surprised at her greeting when she came in, he was still more amazed at the nature of her farewell.

They met almost daily during the next fortnight, for the weather was glorious, and the countryside gay.

The girl had discovered her bearings meanwhile, and was somewhat scandalised with herself for her unmerciful handling of the scholar. Perhaps that was why she met him so kindly now, with a little shade of contrition and sweetness in her manner, which was an intense surprise to him.

She talked to him when others were afraid to, looked after him in the social gatherings where he felt so ill at ease, and, just at first, refrained from uttering half sallies that were on the tip of her tongue.

They became excellent friends. In his reserved and lonely life he had never met anyone so fresh, so unexpected, so interesting. Her first awe of him rapidly wore off, and she took to teasing and tormenting him, a process he seemed to enjoy immensely.

He never attempted to continue the lecture that had ended so abruptly on that first evening, indeed, the girl utterly refused to listen to him on any subject further back than the day before. The man of learning's education had begun in real earnest.

It was the evening of the picnic. They had been much together all day, and were standing by the stepping-stones on their way home.

"I believe," said the girl, trying to look severe, "that you aren't a bit interested in anything that is less than a thousand years old. I'm sure you're wishing at this very moment that I was an old yellow Egyptian mummy. Oh, I'm quite different!" in an exulting tone. "I love everything full up of life—brimming over," and she spread out her arms the better to express her ideas.

"You are very young, you know," he said, considering her gravely.

"You are very stupid, you know," she retorted. "You live in this delicious world, and never see anything a bit nearer than the Flood! But we really must go on, the others will be home before us."

He crossed the stepping-stones first, and helped her over. Between the last stone and the bank the gap was wider, and he held out both hands to assist her.

At another time she would have jumped easily across, but for the life of her she couldn't help keeping him standing in that unusual position a little longer than was necessary.

"It looks very deep," she said. "Should I be drowned if I fell in?"

"I'd fish you out."

She laughed delightedly. The man of learning had never been heard to use such language before. She looked down at the running water at her feet, then up at him, and back at the water in doubt again.

"You won't let go my hands in the middle, will you?"

"No, no!"

"And you'll think of me when I'm in my watery grave?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, I'm really going now," she said, "and I'm certain I shall be drowned."

"Come!" he whispered, holding her hands closer.

Something in his grey eyes, in the smile that wrought such changes in his face, compelled her to drop her bantering words and obey him. She sprang lightly across.

"Well," he said, still holding her hands and smiling. "Now that you are safe will you trust me next time?"

"How can I tell?"

"Say you will! Promise!"

"There's a stone in my shoe," said the girl, struggling to free her hands. "I'm going to sit down here and get it out."

* * * * * *

The man of learning lingered in the neighbourhood all through the wheat harvest, and for no avowed reason. He had exhausted the antiquities for miles round, and should have been back in town by now, at work on his book. But instead he grew daily more fastidious in his dress, and went everywhere he thought the girl was likely to be.

Meanwhile, Toby Atkinson wore a dejected air, and a more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger expression that ill-befitted his tender years. One evening he went up the road past the girl's house.

"I suppose I needn't go in," he thought, "I should only find that ass jawing away as usual."

He came to a break in the line of heavy laurels that skirted the lawn, and paused a moment. Curiosity ran high, and the fence was low.

"I may as well turn in and see what's going on," he thought, and threw a leg over.

At that moment he caught sight of figures moving on the lawn, and stood transfixed.

The girl had stooped to pick a carnation from the border beside her, and turned with a laughing remark to fix it in her companion's coat. The man of learning laid his hands for an instant on her shoulders, and stooped down to kiss her forehead. Toby pulled his leg back hastily and fled.

The third friend to whom he related the story in strictest confidence that evening, remarked:

"And you actually saw him—er—kiss her?"

"Well, yes," snarled Toby, "if you can call a kiss, a kiss—coming from him."

Day Temple.

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THE WRONG MISS SMITH.

A Tale of a Mistaken Identity.

"WHAT'S in a name?" asks Shakespeare. If he had borne mine I think he would have found a great deal. My name has been a nuisance to me ever since I was a boy at school, and that other John Smith used to squabble over my hampers from home, pretending they were addressed to him. I don't believe he ever had a hamper sent in his life, but he always claimed mine, and (being a big boy) occasionally got them.

I do not so much complain of my surname; *that*, I suppose, was an inevitable misfortune. Being, unluckily, born a Smith, I suppose my father, with his large family and small means, could hardly be expected to incur the expense of changing his patronymic, especially as he might have offended aunt Anne (from whom we had expectations) by doing so. But my parents need not have christened me John. John Smith!

One might as well be described as "man" at once. I believe the world swarms with John Smiths. If I travel abroad I am always opening the letters of my namesakes at the *postes restantes*, and, what is worse, they are always opening mine.

I hurried back from a pleasant tour in Scotland on receipt of a telegram that my baby was dangerously ill, and after all it turned out that the message was not intended for me, but for another John Smith, who was coming to my hotel the next day.

I was pleased to see a letter from a fellow-sufferer (who signs himself "J.B."—I suppose for John Brown) in the papers this year. He complains that he got so confused by receiving letters intended for other J.B.'s during his travels that he felt puzzled about his own identity.

I can quite sympathise with him. It is terrible to be always haunted by those "doppelgangers"—to find yourself multiplied, as it were.

I repeat, I consider my parents acted cruelly in not giving me a distinctive Christian name at least. My father had one; *he* was called Erasmus. Why was I not named after him?

I have been more considerate of my children; if they have a common surname, I flatter myself their Christian names are peculiar enough. At present, I must confess, they hardly appear to appreciate my kindness.

Thucydides, my eldest boy, complains that his name exposes him to ridicule at school. Huz, the next brother, has actually dropped his real title, and calls himself Harry.

Keren-happuch, my eldest daughter, is very bitter about *her* nomenclature, arguing that if she marries she will change her surname, but that her "hideous Christian name" will stick to her for life.

I suppose when my youngest hopes, Arethusa and Polyphemus, grow up, they will grumble at me too. But had they only experienced the annoyance of being called by a name common to so many other people, they would know how to thank me.

When Thucydides travels abroad he will have no difficulty about identifying his letters, and Huz is not likely to be dunned for debts of a namesake, as I have often been. If my dear wife had been named Keren-happuch, instead of Mary, I should not have mistaken that telegram about the baby.

It would be tedious to relate all the adventures and annoyances to which my unlucky name has exposed me at various times in my life; how I have been deluded by false hopes of legacies bequeathed to luckier John Smiths; dunned for debts I never incurred; abused for things I had never written; claimed as a relative by people I never saw. But one adventure was a rather remarkable one, and I am tempted to record it.

I have mentioned that I am one of a rather numerous family. I don't mean that the Smiths are, for they seem to me to make up half the population of the earth; but I allude to my own personal branch of that extensive clan. I have a great many relatives, and, being fairly well-to-do, all my relations are friendly with me.

One morning a few years ago, as we were sitting at breakfast, I received a letter from my cousin Caroline, who is married and lives in the country. We do not often hear from her, and, in fact, it was a long time since I had seen any of her branch of the family.

"'My dear John,'" I read aloud, "'I am going to ask you to do me a great kindness——'"

"She wants to come and stay here," interrupted my wife, with fine feminine perception.

"Not exactly," I answered, running my eye over the rest of the epistle, "but she does want us to give a bed for the night to a young *protégée* of hers, a relation in fact—Caroline says a 'mutual cousin.' She is an orphan, poor girl, and passing through London to take a situation as governess in a family in Devonshire. She has been staying with Caroline, and must come to London to get on the South-Western line.

"As she has never been in town in her life, Caroline thought I would take her in just for the night, to save her going to a hotel. The trains don't suit each other, and she must stay a night in London. That's the gist of the letter, without all the apologies and thanks."

"I call it a reasonably cool request," said my wife, proceeding to make sundry severe remarks on the "unconscionableness" of country cousins, as town cousins are wont to do when their spare rooms are thus invaded.

"Poor girl! Caroline says she is an orphan and our cousin," I remarked.

"If you are going to take in all the orphan Smiths who say they are your cousins, you had better buy up the Wanstead Asylum to accommodate them," retorted Mrs. Smith as she left the room to give orders for the reception of our guest, while I turned to a postscript I had hitherto overlooked, and which, as is usual with ladies' postscripts, contained the most important part of the letter.

"You are always so good and kind that I venture to ask you to complete your good action by meeting our poor little cousin at King's Cross to-day at 4.30. She is so terrified at the idea of arriving in London alone. Her name is Smith—Jane Smith—and you will easily recognise her by her deep mourning. I have told her to look out for you."

There was no time to reply. I did not tell my wife of this last request, which certainly was a "leetle" cool. But, after all, it *was* an undertaking for a young girl, new to London, to arrive alone at a crowded terminus, and as we were going to act the good Samaritans, we might as well do the work thoroughly.

I therefore set out for King's Cross at the appointed hour, but, owing to my watch being slow, I arrived rather late in the station.

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The 4.30 train had come in, and the passengers had nearly all dispersed, but lingering on the deserted platform was a tall, graceful girl in deep mourning—evidently my unknown cousin. I hurried up to her.

"I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to Miss Smith?"

She bowed, and I went on:

"I must introduce myself as Mr. Smith—John Smith—whom you expected to meet you. I am so ashamed of being late."

"Pray do not apologise," said the young lady, "it is very good of you to take so much trouble for a stranger, and I thank you very much for it."

Her voice was soft, rich and musical—just the voice I should have expected from her appearance, but *not* exactly the voice of cousin Caroline's family.

Caroline was a good soul, but—well, she was not remarkably aristocratic in appearance or manner.

Now this girl looked unmistakably high-bred. She was beautiful, decidedly so; but it was quite a different class of beauty from the rustic prettiness I had expected.

Her dress, too, though scrupulously plain, did not look like the handiwork of a rural dressmaker (as a family man, I know something of such matters); and the perfect fit and graceful cut of her crape-covered garments were certainly in the style of my wife's best modiste. Altogether my newly-found cousin looked rather more like a young lady whose footman and carriage were in attendance than a poor orphan governess going to her situation.

"You came from Yorkshire by this train?" I asked, as the possibility of a mistake crossed my mind.

"Yes, Mrs. Smith said she had written to ask you to be good enough to take me in for a night."

"Ah, I received her letter, and we shall be very glad to receive you. I believe you are a cousin of ours."

"Very probably," she answered, smiling, "ours must be a numerous family," and my mind set at rest regarding the identity of my fair relative, I called a cab, collected her luggage, and we drove away together.

My companion sat silent for a while; the cheerful tone in which she had greeted me had evidently been called up by an effort, for, as she now thought herself unobserved, I could see tears gathering in her eyes. Poor girl, she was very young to have to fight the battle of life alone!

"You are going into Devonshire to-morrow?" I said.

"Yes, of course, you know all about it. Oh, Mr. Smith, it sounds cowardly to say so, but I do dread it!"

"I don't wonder; going among strangers is, of course, a trial. But you must keep up a good heart, and you may find the ordeal far less terrible than you expect."

"Thank you for encouraging me," she said gratefully. "I am so glad you know all the circumstances. Of course, I feel it is my duty to go; and if I fail, I can but return to Yorkshire, though, of course, I shouldn't like to do that."

"Don't think about failing," I answered cheerfully, feeling that it must be very hard-hearted employers who would be unkind to such a gentle young creature.

"You must tell me all the Yorkshire news," I said, trying to give a different turn to the conversation; but my observation was an unfortunate one, for my fair companion's eyes overflowed as she said hurriedly:

"Don't ask me to talk about my old home just now; it is silly, I know; but I was never all alone in the world before; it is only three weeks since—since—my dear mother died."

I felt dreadfully ashamed of myself, and attempted to explain and apologise; but she stopped me with:

"You only meant to be kind; but, if you please, I can't talk about Yorkshire just yet."

As I was entirely ignorant of my new cousin's history, I thought it safest to forbear all farther allusions to her past or future, lest I should stumble on more unfortunate topics; but I *did* think Caroline might have let the girl stay a little longer with her after her bereavement, before sending her out into a situation.

My companion's sweet, pale face overcame my wife's preconceived prejudices at once, and she received as warm a welcome as though she had been an invited guest. I cautioned Mary to avoid alluding to Yorkshire subjects; and as the evening went on, the girl recovered her spirits, and looked brighter and happier.

"Must you really go on to Devonshire to-morrow, my dear?" asked my wife, as we were separating for the night.

"Oh, yes, now everything is arranged, I had better go. The longer I put it off the less I should be able to muster courage. And if I fail, Mrs. Smith has promised to allow me to stay with her until I can find something to do."

"If you fail, as you call it," said my wife, kissing the stranger as if she had been our own Keren-happuch, "you will come to us, and we will see about finding you a situation. Remember, my dear, there is a room ready for you here, if you need it."

"How good you are!" said the girl gratefully.

When alone together, my wife began to exclaim at the unkindness of Caroline in not allowing the girl a little time to recover from her trouble.

"Poor young thing! It goes to my heart to see her. Fancy the poor child starting off for a situation! I wish we could have kept her here for a week or two first."

"It seems to me, my dear," I remarked mildly, "that you, not I, are the person most desirous to open an orphan asylum for our poor cousins."

"Nonsense!" was Mrs. Smith's conclusive reply.

As I was dressing next morning, I was startled to receive a telegram. I detest those brick-red envelopes, but the contents of this one were of a surprising character. It was from Caroline, and ran as follows:

"*Jane Smith much surprised not to see you yesterday. Waited two hours, then went to Railway Hotel. Please go to her there; she telegraphs in great distress.*"

"What on earth does this mean?" I exclaimed, tossing the note over to my wife. "Why, Miss Jane Smith is in our house at the present moment!"

"John," cried my wife, with a sudden enlightenment, "*you have met a wrong Miss Smith*, depend upon it!"

"Impossible!" I answered, all the more positively, perhaps, because a horrible suspicion that such a mistake was possible occurred to me. "She told me her name was Smith, and that she came from Yorkshire."

"Yorkshire is a large place, and *you* ought to know how many Smiths there are," said my wife, hurrying downstairs.

Our guest was awaiting us in the dining-room.

"I have had such an extraordinary telegram just now," I said, with an air of affected jauntiness, although I was sure that some dreadful mistake had happened. "Mrs. Caroline Smith telegraphs to say that I never met you at the station, and that you are waiting at the Railway Hotel."

"Mrs. Caroline Smith? But I don't know her."

"Didn't you come from her at Helstone? Are you not Miss Jane Smith?" I gasped.

"Jane? My name is Blanche; and as for my surname——ah, Mr. Smith, you know all the circumstances; but as you wrote to me as Miss Smith, I thought you imagined it was better to keep to that name till I knew how matters would go in Devonshire."

"Keep to that name!" Had we then been admitting some deceitful character, disguised under an *alias*, to our family circle? But one glance at that fair face reassured

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me. That countenance never belonged to a doubtful character.

"There has been some dreadful mistake!" said the girl eagerly. "Are you not Mr. John Smith, a solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn?"

"I am Mr. John Smith, a tea merchant, of No. 32 Mincing Lane," I answered solemnly. Of all the disagreeable predicaments my name had brought me into, this was one of the worst; nor were matters improved by the young lady bursting into a flood of tears.

"Oh, what shall I do? What will you think of me?" she sobbed.

"My dear," said my wife kindly, putting her arm round her, "what does the mistake signify? It was foolish of John to make it," with a severe glance at me; "but after all, you have only spent the night here instead of with your own friends, and you will go on to Devonshire to-day just the same.

"John, you had better go and see about your real cousin, instead of standing staring," added Mrs. Smith rather sharply; and I was only too glad to escape.

I found the real Jane Smith at the hotel: such a contrast to our fair guest! She was a short, red-haired, snub-nosed damsel, with, so far as I could judge on this short acquaintance, a rather crusty temper.

She was anything but gracious in the manner of receiving my apologies, although I paid her hotel-bill, and also for her ticket to Devonshire, as peace-offerings. It seemed she had gone to the waiting-room, "as any lady would," after the train arrived, and so missed me.

After waiting two hours she telegraphed to Caroline, and (not knowing my address) went to the nearest hotel. I was sorry for her; but after all, the mistake had been an innocent one on my part.

"You had better make haste home, Mr. Smith," was Jane's valediction to me, as she took her seat in the train for Exeter; "for I feel sure that the person you mistook for me is no better than a swindler. Depend upon it, she only wanted to get into your house for the sake of robbing it!" And with this pleasant adieu she departed.

But I could not believe this. It was certainly an odd thing for a young girl of twenty to be travelling about alone under a feigned name; but if that guest of ours proved an impostor, I would never trust human countenance again. I hurried home, all anxiety to hear her explanation; but my curiosity was not to be thus gratified. My wife met me at the door.

"That poor girl is gone."

"Not with any of our plate, I hope?"

"How absurd you are!"

"Well, tell me all about it—who she is, I mean."

"Oh," said my wife, "will you believe it, John, I know absolutely nothing still, except that her real name is not Smith!"

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed, rather uneasily.

"You need not be so suspicious," said my wife warmly. "Whatever that poor child's story is, I am sure there is nothing discreditable to *her* about it. After you left I began asking her about herself and her plans; but she stopped me so gently that I could say no more.

"'You have all been so good and kind to me,' she said, 'and I do not know what you must think of a stranger whose name you do not know. But mine is a long, sad story, and I hardly think I ought to tell it—at least just now. There is nothing discreditable about it—indeed there is not; but if you will not think me very ungrateful, I would rather keep my secret a little longer. All depends on the success of my Devonshire journey.

"'I came to London, expecting to be met by a relative of the friend—a Mrs. Charles Smith of York—with whom I have been staying, and through his name being the same as your husband's all this mistake occurred. I am so sorry, so ashamed;' and that was all she told me."

"And she is gone?"

"Yes; she was so anxious not to miss the train for Taunton, so I sent her with one of the servants; and, poor child, as she said 'Good-bye,' she whispered, 'Please don't think badly of me because I cannot tell you all about myself now.' John, I am sure that girl is no impostor."

It was all very mysterious; but we expected to receive some enlightenment by-and-bye. Surely our unknown guest would write or take some notice, if only in requital of our hospitality.

But weeks and months rolled away, and we heard no more of our stranger, till by degrees we ceased to talk of her—doubtless to the relief of our friends, whom I fear we bored not a little at one time when our wonder was fresh.

A year passed, the "season" came round again. My wife and I are both fond of music, so now and then I launch into the extravagance of a couple of stalls at the opera when there is anything specially worth hearing.

We were sitting listening to the prima donna's solo, when I happened to glance at the boxes; and there, just above us, in a box on the grand tier, I beheld our fair incognita.

She was just as beautiful, but looked far happier than when I had seen her a year ago. Jewels sparkled on her neck and hair; her dress was costly although simple. She was certainly not gaining a livelihood as a governess. Beside her nodded an elderly lady, who seemed rather tired of the performance.

I was obliged to wait the conclusion of the song before calling my wife's attention to my discovery; and as the curtain fell amid rapturous applause, I caught a fragment of conversation behind me.

"That pretty girl in white with the grey eyes and fair hair—do you mean the one in the box with the old lady who has been asleep half the evening? Oh, that's Lady Blanche Lestrange, one of the beauties of the year. Quite a romance her story is.

"Father quarrelled with his family, and ran away under feigned name; he died; his elder brother died; this girl, the only relative left to the old Earl, her grandfather; grand reconciliation took place some while ago; old grandfather takes her into favour.

"She's staying with Lady Crayland now (that's the sleepy old lady by her), and being introduced to London life. She was presented this month; awfully pretty girl, and will have money too."

This was a revelation! But at this moment the young lady herself, leaning forward in the box, caught sight of us. She recognised us in an instant, a bright flush rose to her cheek, and she bowed and smiled, then, turning to her chaperon, spoke a few words which seemed rather to surprise that worthy lady.

A few minutes later a boxkeeper came with a request that I would come up to Lady Crayland's box. He produced one of her ladyship's cards, below whose name was inscribed in pencil, "Miss Smith."

Of course I went gladly, for I had felt such an interest in our pretty young visitor; and then, and at a subsequent visit Lady Blanche paid at our house, our curiosity was at last satisfied.

The gossip I had heard at the opera was true. Lady Blanche's father was the younger son of the Earl of Shires. By one of those freaks of Nature, difficult to explain, he had been from infancy the exact antipodes of his father.

The Earl was grave, reserved, and proud; his younger son was giddy, eccentric, full of crochets and visions for the rehabilitation of the human race—projects which necessitated a total destruction of all existing institutions as their first step.

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Probably there were faults on both sides, but the father and son never could agree on any subject; and when the young man crowned his enormities by marrying the daughter of his former tutor—a young lady of great beauty and merit, but hardly the bride his father would have selected for him—the family quarrel grew to such a height, that after a stormy scene the youth quitted the paternal mansion, vowing that he would never again hold communication with his family, or even call himself by their name.

Need I say what *alias* he assumed in compliance with this threat? Of course he shrouded himself under the title of Smith.

He had inherited a small property from his mother, and on this income, Mr and Mrs. Smith, as they chose to call themselves, lived abroad, for many years devoting themselves to the care and education of their only child, my visitor.

Lady Blanche grew up in perfect ignorance of her family history; but her father, although he had abjured his rank and family, was careful to educate her as though she were destined to move in the society he had voluntarily quitted.

Perhaps the knowledge that his elder brother was unmarried and an invalid, and that the succession to the earldom might one day devolve on himself, influenced him.

About a year before I met Lady Blanche this actually occurred. Lord Herbert, the elder brother, died, and "Mr. Smith" was now his father's heir.

He was too proud to attempt to open any communications directly with the Earl, but made his wife's health, which had long been failing, a pretext for returning to England, probably with some idea of making himself known. But an accident happened to the train on their journey, and "Mr. Smith" was among the victims killed on the spot.

His widow was utterly crushed by the shock. A sister of hers had married a veritable Mr. Smith, and was now residing in Yorkshire; and in her home Lady Lestrange took refuge, still calling herself by her assumed name.

A weak, gentle woman, she possessed all the obstinacy of a feeble nature; and no arguments on the part of her sister could induce her to call herself by her rightful title or communicate with her husband's family. He had wished to hide himself from them, and nothing should induce her to act contrary to his wishes.

But when her death, six months after that of her husband, left Blanche alone in the world, and examination of her affairs showed that the husband had embarked in unfortunate speculations, which left their daughter practically a beggar, Mrs. Smith, the aunt, again urged that Blanche should make her existence known to her grandfather.

It was decided that Blanche should visit him in person, her aunt rightly judging that her fair face would be her best advocate. On this errand she had come to London when I met her at the station.

Her aunt had written to her brother-in-law, a solicitor residing in London, asking him to meet Lady Blanche at the station, and receive her at his house for a night; and Mr. John Smith had duly kept his appointment. But Mrs. Smith, writing in a hurry, had mistaken the date, and requested him to meet her niece on the 26th, instead of the 25th, of the month, so that he arrived at the station exactly a day too late.

This curious chain of coincidences brought about my mistake. I need not say what was the result of Lady Blanche's Devonshire journey.

The lonely old Earl was only too delighted to own and receive her; and she was now the idol of his age, residing with him at his Devonshire estate, which she had just quitted for a short visit to London.

"But now I want most of all to explain why I appeared so ungrateful," concluded Lady Blanche. "You must have thought it strange that you never heard from me again; but it was not quite my fault. I was actually so foolish as to forget your address.

"Driving up in the cab, I never observed the name of your street; but I remember you did tell me your address in the City. In the worry and fright (for I was really afraid you would take me for an impostor) it went out of my head.

"Grandpapa had a London Directory, and we found the addresses of several Mr. John Smiths." ("I can believe *that*," I remarked aside.) "But when we wrote to them they were not the right ones. So, as I was to come to London in the Spring, I thought I would wait and try to find you out then; for I did so wish to thank you for all your kindness, and explain why I could not tell you this long story before."

It was a satisfactory termination to my adventure, and I am proud of my skill in physiognomy.

Lady Blanche returned to Devonshire, and I have never seen her since. The old Earl spends a great part of the year abroad; and even if they lived in London, we do not visit in the same circles, and would hardly be likely to meet frequently. But each recurring 25th of May brings a *souvenir* of my adventure, in the shape of a kind little note to my wife, and some pretty gift, "in remembrance of the kind reception given on this day to 'Miss Smith.'"

Lacy Hardy.

VIOLET CARYLL'S QUEST.

Telling of the Finding of an Ideal Man.

"Violet, what in the world have you been reading all the afternoon?"

The dark beauty in the hammock looked up with a little yawn, and, brushing away a fly that had made a post of observation of her piquant nose, replied:

"I've been reading a very stupid story entitled 'A Mad Marriage.'"

"Stupid!" exclaimed the blonde, opening her blue eyes to the fullest extent. "I don't think it so."

"Minnie Duncan," said Violet, "you are just the simplest-minded girl in the world."

"Violet Caryll," retorted Minnie, "I should like to know why."

"Why, my dear, you read this book, and thought it beautiful. I thought it stupid because the hero doesn't exist except in the imagination of novelists, who write for men as they ought to be, but not as they are."

"Oh, nonsense, there are good men in the world. You haven't happened to see any of them."

"Well, you must acknowledge, dear, that I've had plenty of chance to find them. I looked in vain for one in London, I saw none in Paris, I saw none in Italy, I saw none anywhere. I found the same old worn-out types, the man of fashion and the man of reason; but the man of noble soul I never met."

"I think I have met one," said Minnie softly, with a tender light in her eyes.

"Oh, yes, you are in love, and you think your lover a hero! Go on, marry him, then you'll find out your deity is only a little clay idol after all. Bah, I hate men!"

There was a step on the gravel walk, and, turning round, Minnie saw a bronzed and bearded fellow, her fair-haired cousin.

"Oh, Tom," she cried, "how glad I am to see you!"

"My sweet little cousin," he said, stroking her golden hair. "So you missed me, eh? But you took good care to console yourself by finding a resting place for this bright head. God bless you, Minnie, I hope you'll be very happy."

And he stooped and kissed her gently on the forehead.

"But, oh, Tom!" she said, "I am forgetting," and turning to where Violet Caryll lay half concealed by the corner of the house, she said:

"Let me present you to my dearest friend, Violet Caryll. Violet, my cousin, Mr. Neville."

Violet bowed without rising from her recumbent posture, and Neville smiled slightly as he thought: "Independent and saucy as she can be!"

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Tom Neville was a magnificent man, six feet one inch high, straight as an arrow, powerful in every sinew, with flaxen hair and beard, and a bright grey eye, but, nevertheless, the calm of this girl annoyed him.

"Tom," said Minnie, "I hear mamma going upstairs, and I want to speak to her. Excuse me, please!"

And Minnie ran into the house, leaving her cousin and her friend together.

"Miss Caryll," Tom said after a moment's silence, "what are you reading?"

"Dear me, Mr. Neville," replied Violet, "what a stupid question! Whenever I read, everyone who cannot find something else to say asks me what I am reading. I might answer you, like Hamlet, 'Words, words, words,' but I'll have compassion on your ignorance and tell you. I am, or was till you came in, reading 'A Mad Marriage.'"

"Do you like novels?"

"Yes, or I shouldn't read them. Nevertheless, I find many of them very provoking, especially those written by women."

"Why?"

"Because they create ideal men, such as we look for in vain in real life. But there are no such men."

"There have been men," said Tom, "who gave up all for love. Antony found it——"

"That will do!" cried Violet. "Poor Marc Antony has been dead and buried nineteen hundred years. Don't, for goodness' sake, don't drag him out and make him the scapegoat of your sex any more."

"Miss Caryll, I am sorry you are so bitter on my sex."

"What are you two discussing?" said Minnie, running out on the verandah. "It's growing dark, too. I hope you haven't been quarrelling."

"Oh, no," said Violet with a sneer, "it takes two people to quarrel, and they must both have some decided characteristics!"

* * * * *

Violet was sitting by the river one afternoon reading. Tom came in from rowing and went and sat down by her.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"The same old question," she replied. "I am reading the same impossible things about the grand love of man for woman."

"And you don't believe it?"

"No."

Tom sprang to his feet.

"Miss Caryll—Violet," he said, "this is too much. You know that I have not watched your every movement for the past six months for amusement. You know that I love you, that I worship you. Tell me I am not mad."

He stretched out both hands to her and stood still. But she rose with a laugh.

"Good-bye, Mr. Neville," she said and, turning she went up the path, leaving him alone.

Tom flung himself upon the greensward and stared blankly out upon the river.

A week passed, Minnie was standing on the verandah, and Violet was mounting her horse for a ride.

"Tom goes away to-morrow, Violet," said Minnie.

"Does he?" said Violet, with a half-suppressed sigh.

"Yes, poor fellow, your refusal has broken his heart."

"His is a—go on, King!" exclaimed Violet, suddenly striking her horse with her little riding whip.

She rode out into the woods among the hills. There was at her heart a dull pain she could not understand. She knew that since she had laughed Tom Neville's love to scorn something of the world's brightness had faded, and yet she told herself every hour, every minute, that she did not care for him, nor for any man. She rode on and on, heedless of the coming night.

Over in the silent west big, black clouds were gathering, and lightning danced across the sky.

But Violet was too deep in her thoughts to notice these things. And presently the storm burst upon her with all its fury.

At the first drop of rain she turned to go home, but the terrific flash of lightning, accompanied by a deafening burst of thunder, broke down from the inky heavens, and a towering tree fell, splintered and blasted, immediately behind her horse. The terrified beast, mad with fright, dashed down the road at a wild gallop. Violet tugged at the reins till her little hands were purple and swollen, but to no purpose. On went the horse, faster and faster.

Turning another short curve in the road she saw another large tree lying directly across her path. Then she knew her fate. She had often heard of frightened horses running headlong into stone walls, and she knew her horse would not stop till he had hurled himself against the fallen monarch of the hills.

She closed her eyes in terror. Then she felt a sudden slackening of her horse's speed; and she opened her eyes to find Tom Neville holding the bit in an iron grasp, while the horse, still struggling forward, trampled under foot the manly limbs. But Tom never let go his hold till the brute stopped and Violet dismounted.

"Thank God, you are safe!"

"But you are hurt!" she cried, wringing her hands. "Oh, what shall I do?"

"I am—sorry," he said, with an effort, his face becoming pale, "to trouble you, Miss Caryll, but I fear—you—will have to go home—alone—and send someone—after me."

For a moment Violet hesitated, and then, remounting her still trembling horse, she rode away.

As soon as her back was turned, Tom Neville sank back senseless, for both his legs were broken.

When Tom returned to consciousness he found himself in his own room, in bed, with both his legs confined in a casing of plaster of Paris.

Violet came in after a while.

"Mr. Neville," said Violet, in a low, tremulous voice. "I have come to thank you for my life, and to ask you to forgive me."

"To forgive you?"

"Yes, for hurting you, first in your heart, and then in your limbs. If I could only give my life to atone for the wrong I have done you!"

And tears rolled down her cheeks while she buried her face in her hands.

For a few minutes both were silent. Then she looked up and their eyes met.

"Violet," he asked softly, "will you give your life to atone for my pain? Will you give it—to me?"

"Tom!" she cried, throwing herself on her knees beside the bed; "take me! I love you!"

A. R. Manice.

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THE END OF A FEUD.

In which Love Set All Things Right.

"But isn't she pretty, though?" murmured Mrs. Lambert.

Mr. Lambert responded by a look too full of gratification for words.

They were not quite in their dotage, these two old people, but they were very old, and the appearance of their long expected niece at their home had produced upon them an overwhelming sensation.

Not only was it a novelty to have a young person in the house, but such a perfectly radiant creature was rare in any house.

Such a face of roses and lilies, with burnished curls of gold drooping on the low brow—sweet eyes of dark violet and Heaven's own smile.

Nothing like Juliet Faye's beauty was ever seen at Arcott, and the old people were sure, with her gentle manners, that she was as good as she was pretty.

She was the youngest child of Mrs. Lambert's youngest sister, lately deceased, and she had come to the Lilies to reside permanently.

"Sixteen! Old enough to come out," murmured Mrs. Lambert. "And such a little lady! Lydia Bellingham has no such girl among hers!"

Now it had secretly vexed dear Mrs. Lambert that Mrs. Bellingham, her social rival, had always a crowd of pretty granddaughters and nieces at her house, making the place, since young ladies are irresistibly attractive, very popular. But not one was to compare with the lovely Juliet.

Juliet, escaping after two hours' examination, from her relatives' presence, was allured down the main walk of the old garden.

It was indeed a garden of lilies. Yellow day-lilies drooped in beds, white ones gleamed, and clumps of spotted tigers glowed in the sun, while the red velvety amaryllis burnt like fire among the green.

Coming at length to the water, the girl uttered a cry of delight; for, dappled with sunshine, shimmered hosts of lovely white water-lilies. She clasped her hands in ecstasy.

She was certainly charming in her azure dress and with pretty uncovered head, at the edge of the water; and perhaps the occupant of a little canopied boat up the river thought so, for silently the boat glided away from its moorings among the willows and came slipping along the dark waters of the pool.

"Would you like some lilies?" asked a baritone voice.

And, turning, startled, Juliet saw the handsomest young man she had ever seen in her life sitting in the stern of the pretty boat, his hat in his hand. The voice, the attitude, the courteous question, disarmed apprehension.

"Yes, I should," she replied, with only a natural constraint.

In an instant the young gentleman had changed his seat and shot among them. In a moment he had a great, fragrant, dripping handful, and the young girl's eagerness and delight brought a smile to his rather gloomy countenance.

"Oh, I never saw anything so beautiful!" she cried.

"I suppose they are pretty," replied the young man; "but I've seen them every June for five years, and they haven't the charm of novelty for me. Indeed, nothing here has. You are a stranger, are you not?"

He had pushed his boat among the rushes to hand her the flowers, and sat looking over his shoulder at the roseate face she turned to him.

"Yes, I have come to the Lilies to live. Mrs. Lambert is my aunt."

The young man gave vent to a soft, low whistle.

"Sorry," he said.

Then laughing, and with his usually wearied expression displaced by one of mirth, he was such a very handsome fellow that Juliet was lost in admiration; but in an instant the girl's expression changed.

"Why?" she asked.

"Well, you know," replied her companion frankly, "I haven't seen such a pretty girl as you are since I have lived here, and I would like to have an introduction and call at your home, if it was any other place. But at the Lilies—out of the question," he concluded.

Then, as she regarded him in perplexity, he lifted his straw hat, and with a pleasant parting glance, pulled away out of the pool and round a sudden bend of the river out of sight.

Juliet breathed in the delicious odour of her lilies pensively, and turned homewards. Her adventure had been a pleasure, but it left a regret.

"I never met anybody so nice," she said. "But he will forget me."

That evening her Aunt Lambert said:

"My dear, I hope you will be discreet as you are pretty—about making acquaintances, for one thing."

"Yes, aunt," murmured Juliet, with a little blush.

"Be choice—be select. Above all, don't admit the Brennans to your acquaintance."

"Who are they, auntie?"

"The Brennans are uncle and nephew, who live on the next estate, separated by the river. Colonel Brennan is very wealthy, and Roland, his nephew, is his heir. The former is a bachelor."

"Why mustn't I know them?" asked Juliet.

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"On account of a family feud which has existed for twenty years," replied the old lady solemnly. "Twenty years ago, my dear, you must know that my daughter, your cousin Emily, was a very pretty girl. She was engaged to Colonel Brennan—then only Lieutenant Brennan. He seemed fond of her; she adored him. Suddenly, without cause or explanation, he jilted Emily—dropped the engagement in silence, and she making her wedding clothes! It nearly killed my poor girl.

"Her father threatened to shoot him, but I said, 'No violence!' I preferred the dignified course. I nursed my poor child, dragged her about in travel—kept her from mourning herself to death—until I met Admiral Phillips, and I persuaded Emily to marry him. He was older than she, but he was rich and an upright man, and I knew would make her a good husband, and I knew she would learn to love him. She did; but we have never forgiven Colonel Brennan—your uncle and I—and we never shall!"

"Has he married?" asked Juliet, her blue eyes wide with this disastrous love tale.

"No. I never knew why," replied Mrs. Lambert.

Another afternoon found Juliet again in the garden.

Her footsteps strayed again to the lily pool.

Looking across the river, and seeing the walls of a grand, grey mansion rising among the green, a suspicion that she had already admitted one of the forbidden Brennans to her acquaintance crept into her heart.

Yet a blush and a smile illuminated her lovely countenance as she saw the pretty canopied boat float out from among the willows.

"Good afternoon," called out the young man across the lily pads, and indeed he looked quite vivacious; "I was in hopes you would come down here. Isn't it a lovely day?"

He pulled up among the bobbing pads.

"Would you like some more lilies?"

"Yes," returned Juliet, "but—but," she faltered, "I am afraid you are one of the Brennans, and I am forbidden to know them."

He looked up with an understanding glance and a smile.

"If I am, you will have to excuse me for it. We will have the lilies in any event," pulling at the long, glistening, pink-green stems; "now these are regular beauties—the finest of the season. Glad I can do something for you. It's very jolly to have a young lady down here. I was lonely. Do you want any more?" loading her hands. "Won't you come into the boat?" he added earnestly, seeming to apprehend that the meeting would now end; "it's nice here on the water, and very comfortable, and if I am a Brennan, I am respectable," he added.

He met her wistful eyes with sympathy.

"You want to come—I see you do. And, you see, you don't know that I am a Brennan," he laughed.

"No," faltered Juliet.

And the sunshine was so bright on the crystal stream, the shadows so golden-green under the willows, the distance so alluring, she set a little foot in the boat and in a moment was far down the river, winding between the rushes.

A heaven on earth followed, "for gay youth loves gay youth," and green and blue were glad together that afternoon. But when Juliet sprang upon the grass again the smile faded from her face.

"I know well enough that you are Roland Brennan," she said. "Thank you for a nice time, but please don't ask me to go boating again. My aunt is very kind to me, and I don't wish to disobey her."

"But what am I to do?" asked the young man quickly. "I never had such a happy afternoon in my life. Why, I'm terribly lonely. My uncle won't let me associate with Tom, Dick, and Harry, even if I wanted to, because we are rich and must keep up the dignity of the family. And he won't let me take up a profession or learn a business because he wants to keep me with him. He's a grand old fellow; but, oh, it's dreadful here for me. I suppose you think it cruelty, but I've come to almost hate the place, and now I like you so well you—you are going to throw me over."

"Oh, no," said Juliet, blushing. "I couldn't do anything so rude," innocently. "I—I presume we shall meet sometimes?"

"Where?"

"In society. I am to be at the picnic to-morrow; and my aunt is to take me next week to spend a few days with Mrs. Bellingham."

"Good! Then I see my way clear," exclaimed the young man, throwing up his hat enthusiastically.

At the picnic at Mrs. Bellingham's hospitable house, at parties and balls, this Romeo and Juliet met; and, though the girl's heart quaked sometimes under her aunt's proud old eyes, and a sorrowful shame filled her breast, Roland Brennan's tact staved off discovery until late in the autumn.

Juliet knew that by a word, a smile, she made this handsome lover very happy, and if a proud and resentful relative was to be made miserable by the fact that she loved this forbidden young man as dearly as he loved her, she could not feel quite altogether to blame.

If Aunt Lambert had been stern she would not have cared at all, but she was the most indulgent of guardians, and Juliet could not be altogether happy, though she lay among the roses and fed on the lilies of life.

Then Mrs. Emily Phillips came from abroad.

She was a pretty, blooming woman of forty, evidently with a perfectly sound heart. She had been a widow a year. She had a sunny smile, and Juliet liked her.

Juliet had committed herself to a secret skating expedition with Roland Brennan. The river was frozen for the first time, and both were passionately fond of the amusement.

She had run lightly down the snowy garden, and had caught Roland's arm with a merry salutation, when two figures, warmly wrapped in furs, stepped from under the pine trees.

Roland started violently; the little skates dropped with a clang from Juliet's nerveless hand.

"Juliet!" cried Aunt Lambert reproachfully.

"Mr. Roland Brennan!" pronounced Uncle Lambert stiffly.

The four eyed each other solemnly in the moonlight. Roland was the first to recover himself.

"Mr. Lambert," he said, "give me an opportunity to talk this over with you."

"No time like the present. Come to the house," said Uncle Lambert.

So the four marched into the dimly-lit drawing-room.

"I can never, never forgive Juliet!" sobbed Aunt Lambert, breaking down and throwing herself into an easy chair.

"But I fail to see," commenced Roland, manfully addressing both the old people, "where we have done any harm. How could I help loving Juliet, having first seen her by accident? I would die to save her a sorrow! Have a care, Mr. Lambert, how you slight so honest a love as mine for your niece, who, excepting you, has no other friend in the world, I believe. Am I so bad a match for her?"

"Your uncle, young man, treated my daughter very badly!" exclaimed Mrs. Lambert. "The family feud——"

"Here let it end," pronounced a pleasant voice from behind, and Mrs. Phillips and an elderly gentleman advanced into the apartment. "I have forgiven Colonel Brennan."

"I was lied to by a rival," interrupted Colonel Brennan. "I was induced to believe that Emily was to jilt me at the last minute. I denied myself ever seeing her again, but I have been a very unhappy man, my friends. When I had reason to believe I had been deceived, the woman I loved was far away. Before I could reach her she was married. After all these years she has forgiven me."

"We are to be married at Christmas, so let resentment against these young folks end. Let us all be happy together," said Emily with her sunny smile, which was so contagious that Aunt Lambert snatched weeping Juliet to her breast and kissed her.

Then all the women kissed each other and the three men shook hands. And there has never been a shadow of trouble in the family since.

Clara Aspen.

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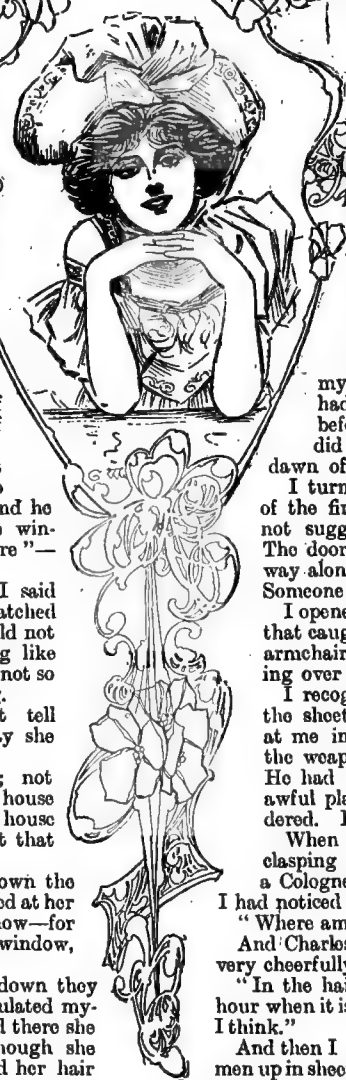
ONLY A MODEL.



The Story of a Jealous Wife.

SHE sat at the window constantly. I'm not a jealous woman but I must say I could not help noticing that from the first.

The window was opposite the dining-room window, and the dining-room was also our sitting-room. And there she was all the time Charles Augustus was at home. I did not see him look at her, but of course he did. Men are all alike. Besides, if I saw her, why shouldn't he?

If he had frankly owned it, I'd have not thought of the matter; but when I said to him, "That's rather a pretty girl, isn't it?" and he said, "What girl?" And I said, "At the window." And he said, "Haven't seen a soul there"—why I began to be suspicious.

So, when I'd said, "Ah!"—just "ah!"—I said no more, but I watched; and the more I watched the more unpleasant matters grew. You would not have liked it either, to see a bold-faced thing like that staring at your husband, I can tell you; not so much as pretending to read or sew, or anything.

I am a little near-sighted, and I couldn't tell what her expression was; but the very way she carried her head was enough for me.

I'll tell you just where the window was; not opposite, but at the side, as it were. Our house was the first house in the street, and the house with the window was the first in the street that crossed it.

At first I contented myself with pulling down the blinds, but she never minded that. Then I stared at her—after Charles Augustus had gone out, you know—for she kept there still. But a man came to the window, and of course I had to go away.

I suppose he pulled their blinds down, for down they were at all events, pretty soon, and I congratulated myself; but next morning they were up again, and there she was, with her hair in puffs and curls, as though she were going to a ball. No woman ever dressed her hair in that way before breakfast without having some reason for it.

Now, Charles Augustus and I had only been married a year, and I had no fault to find with him; but still, men are so much alike all the world over, and it was odd he never spoke of her. If he had said, "What a very forward young person," or, "It must annoy you, my dear, to have anyone staring like that, into your room," or something of that sort, it would have seemed so much better.

I felt sure he noticed her, and at last I knew it. He had bidden me good-bye just as fondly as possible, and pretending that he had something to do which obliged him to go out earlier than usual; and, ten minutes after, happening to go to my window, I saw him in that room. Yes, at the very window, with that impudent creature. I felt my head swim, and I couldn't see or hear anything for a moment. Then I summoned all my courage.

"Edith Robins," I said to myself, "you must do something. You must not sit down tamely and let this go on. Put on your hat, go round the corner, enter the door, and face that creature; put an end to this abominable flirtation at once, before worse comes of it."

At once I grew strong. I rose and put on my hat and jacket. I took my parasol in my hand, and, choking down my tears, walked slowly out of the door I had entered a happy bride twelve months before. Should I ever be happy again? I did not know; perhaps this was but the dawn of some great misery.

I turned the corner and entered the hallway of the first house. It was dingy and dark. It did not suggest the neighbourhood of refined people. The doors were all closely shut, but I made my way along the hall and knocked at the first one. Someone called "Come in."

I opened the door and entered. The first thing that caught my eyes was a tall figure, sitting in an armchair, wrapped in a sheet. A man was bending over him. Something glittered in the air.

I recognised the face of Charles Augustus in the sheeted form, and the ruffian who had stared at me in the dreadful creature who brandished the weapon over his head. It was all plain to me. He had by some means been beguiled into this awful place that he might be robbed and murdered. I gave a shriek and fainted away.

When I came to myself Charles Augustus was clasping me in his arms, and a strange man held a Cologne bottle to my nose, while the bold creature I had noticed stared down at me. I gasped:

"Where am I?"

And Charles Augustus answered very kindly, but not very cheerfully,

"In the hairdresser's, my dear, and as it is just the hour when it is busiest, the sooner we get home the better, I think."

And then I began to understand. They wrap gentlemen up in sheets before they cut their hair and shave them, you know, and the deadly weapon was a razor. And the bold creature—well, there she stood, and she certainly had her hair curled and puffed—but as below her shoulders she was only a wooden block, it did not matter. I had been jealous of a hairdresser's sign!

A. B. Charter.

"You are a queer girl. I never know how to take you." "Pshaw! Why, the trams go right by the door." "What door?" "The Metropole Theatre."

"SHE is so aristocratic; says she never will marry a man who is in business for himself." "How particular! I dare says she prefers someone more like herself—in everybody else's business."

HE (tremblingly): "I have one last wi-wish to ask you be-before we part in an-anger for ever." She (sobbingly): "Wha-what is it, Geo-George?" He: "Wi-will you me-meet me next Th-Thursday, as us-usual?" She: "I wi-will, George"

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Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*

And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Six more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

SIXTH LIST.

61. AEGNRT	**67. CHHIINT** .....
62. CENOPRSTW	**68. ENNORTV** .....
63. AEHLLOOPRT	**69. ABEEENORSTU** .....
64. BENORRTU	**70. ABEELNSWYY** .....
65. ADFLORS	**71. ADLLOR** .....
66. ABELNORTY	**72. ADEEGRRT** .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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The Course of True Love.

The Story of a Proposal that was Badly Worded.

It was a warm, cloudless Saturday afternoon in July. The sun beat down with such fierceness on the river that the boats had nearly all sought shelter. Many of them had disappeared to Chester and were moored at Eccleston Ferry whilst the owners consumed strawberries and cream in the pleasant tea-rooms there.

At various places along the stream where the trees grew over the river banks, solitary boats were lying hidden beneath the overhanging foliage.

Occasionally a light skiff shot swiftly past, leaving a silver trail along the stream. The occupant heard the clatter of tea cups, the tinkling of spoons, a sudden peal of laughter, and, if he were a stranger, he glanced in amazement along the apparently deserted river, drowsing faintly in the heat. Then he bent to the oars and sent the skiff forward with a leap. It was not his turn to-day.

One poor solitary being, however, had better luck than the others. Just before he reached the outskirts of the city he was recognised by a girl who leant over a garden wall.

He pulled in towards the bank, whilst she ran to a gate and re-appeared in a twinkling at the top of the private landing stairs. And in another minute she was seated at the bow with the rudder lines in her hands, and the boat swept into the stream again.

"We could not have had more beautiful weather," she said presently. "It's almost perfect, especially for the one who steers."

"I'm quite satisfied with my share of the work," he answered.

"But you must be very fond of rowing."

"No, it isn't that, I'm afraid you don't understand," he said slowly.

"No?"

"I wouldn't change places with anyone else because——"

"Did you hear that teaspoon?" she interrupted, tragically. "I wonder what they're having. Do you know, Jack, it's abominally greedy of me, but I'd change places with anyone who would offer me a cup of tea and a slice of cake."

"I have the materials here in the boat, and as soon as we find a quiet corner, we'll make tea if you wish."

"And the Genoa cake?"

"Yes, that was the sort you told me to get."

"I thought perhaps you might have forgotten it," she said, and smiled in relief.

"I never forget," he answered.

It was one of Jack Shrewsbury's limitations that he could not make love gracefully. The art of paying compliments was one he rather despised, and perhaps the girls thought no less of him on that account.

As a matter of fact, there are two classes that find favour, the men who pay compliments and the men who don't. But apart from this, there was something about the dogged strength of Jack's character that most people liked.

This was to be their last afternoon together on the river, for he had been transferred to a branch office of his firm at Leicester and was due there on Monday morning.

Most of his belongings had already gone, and this being a Saturday afternoon, he had arranged to meet Grace Churchill that they might have a final picnic on the river together. For they were already good friends these two, and drifting into a still closer friendship.

They soon found a quiet corner where the overhanging trees afforded shelter, and here he ran the skiff in close to the bank and tied the rope to some branches. And then he opened a mysterious black bag and produced a bewildering array of good things.

Tea, sugar, tinned milk, bread, butter, Genoa cake, a little camp stove, a bottle of methylated spirit, a tin kettle, and everything else necessary for a successful picnic. But he produced them all in such a serious kind of way, as though the whole affair were a matter of business, that poor Grace had to look at the Genoa cake several times to keep up her cheerfulness. And as for any thoughts she may have had on a subject even more important than Genoa cake it was not her fault if these thoughts grew less friendly as the afternoon wore on.

"I've something very special to say," he remarked after tea. "It's the last chance I shall have for some time, Grace, so I thought I'd better ask you now."

"Yes?"

"It will be very lonely in lodgings away in Leicester," he said thoughtfully.

"Yes, I suppose so."

She was pulling idly, and yet with a certain impatience at an overhanging branch, as she spoke. It slipped from her fingers suddenly and the sudden recoil caused the boat to rock a little.

"All due to nervousness," he said calmly, and smiled. "It's evidently time that somebody began to look after you, Grace. That's the matter about which I want to speak to you. And first about my position at the office, it has a rather important bearing on the subject."

"Are you certain of that?" she said, colouring a little, "because if your position has very little to do with—with what you were going to speak about, would it not be better not to mention it?"

"It is the most important part of the subject," he interrupted, and she shrugged her shoulders a little scornfully and said no more. But her eyes were troubled as she sat and watched the water lapping quietly against the side of the boat.

Girls are apt to think so much of the details of a proposal,

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and yet, had she but known, it was only the rugged honesty of his nature which caused him to place the money aspect first.

"I have £175 a year now, and they have promised me an advance at Christmas," he said presently; "and it would take us until next Spring to find a suitable house and to arrange about this and that and the other. But I thought I'd better mention it to you this afternoon as we may not meet again for some time."

She made no comment, so he continued:

"Of course it is not so much my present salary as the prospect this Leicester appointment offers. It will very likely lead to a district managership at £300 to £500 a year. What do you think, Grace?"

"About what?"

"About what I asked you."

"You haven't asked me anything," she answered, and gave him a glance that should have fired any heart less than fifty years of age. It was only her womanly pride which refused to yield to him, all else was won. But although he really did love her with all his heart, he took no account of womanly pride.

"I have asked you to marry me," he answered with just the faintest excitement in his voice.

"And I—oh, let us drop the subject," she said miserably.

"I should like to have an answer."

"Then it must be 'No.'"

"No!"

"It is such a beautiful afternoon," she said hastily, trying to hide her distress. "See how the sunlight comes glinting through these leaves and branches. And I think the air is cooler now, the boats are creeping out into the river again. Won't you take me home?"

"As you wish," he said slowly, and with something suspiciously like a groan. "I should not have spoken as I did, I am sorry to have troubled you, but I have lived in a fool's paradise all the summer. Well, it can't be helped.

"Is there no chance that you will change your mind, Grace?" he said wistfully. "I don't mind waiting. I don't mind what hard conditions you make if only I may hope to win you at the end. Don't you think you might become fonder of me in time? You do like me a little, don't you, Grace?"

"I don't know," she murmured, and felt her resistance weakening. If only he had spoken like this at first!

"But you must tell me. Do you like me at all, just as a friend?"

"Yes."

"Do you care for me a little more than for your other friends?"

"I don't know. How can I tell?"

"But you must tell," he said, and leaning forward he clasped her hands. "Don't you care for me a little more than for the others?"

He removed his hat and stood before her bareheaded, but she took no notice.

The sunbeams peeped curiously between the leaves and danced upon the water as it washed idly against the sides of the boat. Everything seemed to be waiting for her reply to this question. And she raised her eyes suddenly and looked at him as surely no one had looked before.

"Yes, I do," she said, and then, afraid lest she had said too much. "I don't know anyone else," she added naively.

"Then will you promise me," he cried triumphantly, "that you will marry me when I have £300 a year?"

"That has nothing to do with it," she said, and drew her hands away.

"I don't understand."

"Let us go home," she said hurriedly. "I am tired of the subject, you must not mention it again."

"But I thought——"

"I don't want to hear another word."

He protested and begged and demanded in turn, but all in vain, for her womanly pride was thoroughly roused by this time. They backed the boat into the open stream and he bent to his work with a will.

The heat of the early afternoon had gone, but the river lay like a sheet of silver, rippling softly beneath the breeze. The boat swept forward at a great rate, for Jack was pulling a long, concentrated stroke that held more than an echo of his disappointed hopes.

When they reached the private landing stairs, he held the boat steady whilst she alighted. They looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"Is there no hope?" he said presently.

"No hope."

"Don't you care sufficiently to wait for me? But there," he added bitterly, "a poor beggar like me has no chance. I can see your face harden each time I mention my position at the office."

"You are unkind now."

"Perhaps I am, though Heaven knows I don't wish to be so. Good bye, Grace."

They shook hands in silence and then she turned suddenly and fled through the doorway.

"If only he had said he loved me, I would have married him to-morrow," she thought, and then, sinking on to a garden seat, she covered her face with her hands and cried as though her heart were breaking.

And Jack turned away, and pulled moodily down the stream, lost in amazement that Grace, of all girls, should be so mercenary.

The consolation that Jack applied to his wounded heart was not creditable either to himself or to Grace. As a matter-of-fact, although he tried to make up his mind that Grace had refused him because she did not expect he would ever attain to a managership, he was not such a curmudgeon as to believe it.

But he tried hard to believe that this was the reason, and

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when he went off to Leicester on Monday morning it was with a firm determination to prove his boast, or perish in the attempt.

The dogged, unyielding nature of the man came to his aid. He flung himself into the struggle with irresistible energy, working early and late.

As time went on the spirit of the fight gripped him body and soul, it fascinated him. Here was life worth living, the life of the commercial arena, where pluck and firmness were bound to win.

He became a manager, and that in less than four years. And having thus attained one object of his ambition he resolved to journey to Chester to try if he could not compass the other.

But apparently the Fates willed otherwise, for just at this high tide of his fortunes, some American financiers, who had presumably outworn their commercial reputations at home, came to England and cast covetous eyes upon the trade wherein Jack was engaged. The British manufacturers, scenting danger, joined their forces to meet the invader and the result was a huge combine of some twenty businesses.

The next step was the reduction of the staff, particularly those in the higher ranks, by something like fifty per cent. Here Jack's cleverness and previous success did him the unkindest turn of all.

His rapid progress had aroused the envy of those below him, as much as the jealous alarm of his immediate superiors and when the time came for the final selection, he found himself ignominiously in the cold.

He soon obtained another situation, but the salary was only £130 a year as against his former £300. Well, it was not his fault, he had done his best, and besides the fight was not over yet. He was still in the same business, and might yet work his way higher than he had gone before.

And then in the midst of his meditations, he suddenly thrust away all thought of the struggle, and there came into his mind a vision of a broad, smooth, flowing river, with banks all overhung with trees, and light skiffs that darted here and there amid the sunshine.

He was not due at his new situation for three days. He had not been to Chester since—then he shrugged his shoulders despairingly at the thought that that dream was all over now. But all the time he was throwing his things into his bag with a reckless haste that grew upon him with every minute.

He knew, or thought he knew, that his affair with Grace was quite impossible now, but still that wild longing tore at his heart and drove him half-unwillingly to the other side of England.

The bitterness of temporary failure, so galling to a determined nature, was upon him, and he longed to escape if only for a few days, from the scene of his disaster. And so he took his ticket and set out for Chester—perhaps the quaintest, most mediæval city in England. Here, he thought would be peace, with a rest from all ambitious dreams. But here, had he only known it, he was to experience the bitterest shock of all.

By a curious coincidence one of the first people he saw on leaving the station at Chester was Grace's brother. He was running to catch a train, so there was only time to shake hands hurriedly and make an appointment for that evening.

Jack felt quite pleased by this little meeting, for no doubt Grace would hear of it, and—and would laugh, he told himself bitterly, to think how his boast had come true one minute, to be falsified the next.

Nevertheless he hired a skiff that afternoon and rowed quietly down the stream. As he drew nearer to the well-remembered garden his heart began to beat faster.

He had no desire to force his company, but if he could see her only for a minute as he rowed past—and at that very moment he did see her coming quietly down the garden path. He stopped rowing and the boat began to drift quietly with the stream.

Presently she came to the end of the garden, and stood with her elbows leaning upon the low wall, looking thoughtfully down the river.

Jack's pride, his resolution, were all swept away in an instant, before an irresistible surge of passion. He rose to his feet, although the narrow skiff rocked dangerously as he did so.

He took off his hat and stood before her bare-headed, with his eyes shining, seeing only her. And she turned scornfully away, with an unmistakable curl of the lips, and deliberately walked back into the house.

Two hours later Jack sat in his lodgings almost broken-hearted, with his tea standing untasted before him. There was no possibility of mistake for she had deliberately cut him dead, and no doubt had done so to let him know her opinion of his failure at Leicester.

Well, each to his taste, but it was not what he expected from Grace, of all people. But even yet he refused to admit that she had been to blame. There was some misunderstanding somewhere, she must have heard some distorted tales of his misfortunes.

"A letter for you, sir," said the landlady, "just come by the afternoon post."

He took it from her mechanically, and she left the room again. Then he glanced at the writing and his indifference vanished in an instant. He ripped the envelope from end to end, and drew out a correspondence card, from which he read as follows:

"Dear Jack,—*George tells us you are back in Chester for a few days' holiday, and that he arranged to meet you to-night. Unfortunately he has had to go to Manchester on business so cannot keep his appointment, but if you will call round here this evening, mother and I will be pleased to see you.*

"*We were very sorry indeed to hear of your ill-luck just when you were on the high road to success, but hope the reverse will be only temporary.*

"*Yours sincerely,*

"Grace Churchill."

Jack leant back in his chair and stared amazedly at the letter. How could he reconcile these words with the events of the afternoon? Twist and turn his theories as he would he arrived continually at the same result.

The argument that explained the scornful turning aside in the afternoon could not interpret the friendly tone of the letter he had just received, although it was evident that the same argument would have to suit both.

Anyhow the letter was there, and it cheered him wonderfully, so much so that he promptly attacked his tea and punished the marmalade and the lettuces tremendously. And then, like a sensible fellow, he decided to go round and answer the letter in person.

As he walked through the quiet, old-fashioned streets, the twilight was already beginning to fall upon the city, although it was only about seven o'clock.

Somehow the letter was gaining the ascendency in his mind. Not that he doubted the events of the afternoon, they were too recent and too undeniable for that, but he became more convinced every moment that there was some mistake, which a few words with Grace would soon put right.

He did not feel quite so hopeless about other matters now. Of course he told himself once for all about every alternate minute that his chance with Grace was *nil*, and that, in fact, he could not even ask her again as matters were at present, but in spite of all this there was a distinct feeling of hope in his heart as he opened the garden gate and strode briskly along the path.

It was almost dark now, and as he neared the house he distinguished two figures standing in the porch and whispering earnestly together. Evidently it was a farewell of some kind, for they presently shook hands, and the tall figure stooped and kissed his companion several times.

Jack drew back, not wishing to spy upon them, and the

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next moment the man had torn himself away and run lightly past him down the path.

The girl remained at the door until Jack came forward into the open space in front of the steps. Then she looked at him hurriedly, as though startled, and suddenly ran into the house without a word. But before this, even though she stood in the shadow, he had recognised Grace.

He turned away with a heavy sigh. After this, it was out of the question for him to pay his visit as he had intended.

If she had become engaged to somebody else, it would have been kinder to have told him, he thought. And so he neared the gate, and seeing a garden seat, he flung himself upon it with a groan and stared moodily at the ground.

Someone opened the gate lightly and entering the garden, stared curiously at him for a moment, then, apparently satisfied as to his identity. "George," she said anxiously. "Whatever are you doing there?"

Jack sprang to his feet and strode towards her. "You are mistaken," he said bitterly. "My name is Shrewsbury."

"Jack! Is that you?" Her voice had lost its anxious tone and was full of delighted surprise. "What are you doing by yourself there?" she added, "come into the house at once."

"Had we not better say good-bye, here and now? I didn't know you were engaged, Grace, until——"

"Until when?"

"I saw you just now at your front door bidding good night to—to George, I suppose."

"You recognised me?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure? Come closer, Jack, and say if it was I you saw."

He came closer and stared eagerly at her with a new hope springing in his heart.

"Are you still certain?" she asked presently.

"I am certain of your voice, Grace, but you seem older than before. And your dress is different."

Then she broke into a sudden peal of laughter. "The one you saw at the front door was Doris, my younger sister. They say she is exactly like I was four years ago. She was away at a boarding school and spent the first half of the holidays with friends, that summer when——" She stopped, colouring slightly.

"When you gave such a shock to my self-esteem."

"Only to your self-esteem?"

"To far more than that," he answered, "and experiences in business have made me think your opinion of me was right, Grace."

"I did not express any opinion."

"You said you did not care for me."

"No, no," she murmured. "I didn't say that."

"Then what did your refusal mean?"

"It meant that I wouldn't marry you for your money, or position, or prospects," she said, "that was all."

"Well?"

"You didn't ask me if I would marry you for any other reason," she continued quietly.

"I have no right to ask you now," he said sadly.

Then she stepped forward and looked him bravely in the face.

"That is not for you to say," she said, with that affectionate wilfulness which had always charmed him. "You must ask me at once, and leave it to me to decide."

Wal Frank.

Mrs. Sniffles: "Henry, I think I hear mice gnawing at the dining-room door." Sniffles: "Don't be alarmed, dear; it's only the cook writing a letter to her lover."

"Bunkins, I believe, is about the smartest man of his years in this city of ours," said the man who observes. "Knows a great deal does he?" "Knows a great deal? I should say so. Why, sir, that man knows almost as much as his nineteen-year-old daughter, who is at college."

Your Editor Chats.

The Juggled Letters Competition will be completed in twelve lists; the sixth list appears on page 47. I would again draw my readers' special attention to the Billiard Tables which are being offered among the other prizes. They will form a most desirable addition to any house. The size has been chosen with a special view to their being easily removable, and to allow of their being put up in any ordinary sized room. Cues, balls, and other necessary accessories are given away with each of the tables.

Several competitors have asked whether they may put down more than one name if they are able to make more out of any separate set of letters. It is distinctly stated in the conditions of the competition that the name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct, but only one must be put down.

It is not to be expected that everyone's idea of what is a good story will coincide, and so that I may thoroughly understand what kind of stories my readers prefer, I have decided to offer a pencil-case each week to the reader who gets the stories in each week's number in the order nearest to that approved of by the majority. Write on the back of a postcard the names of the stories in this issue in the order in which you prefer them, and then send the postcard to Preference No. 1, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., to arrive not later than by first post on Tuesday, July 14th. The decision of the Editor as to the awarding of the prize in case of a tie must be regarded as final.

At the time of writing, the sunshine, after the recent terrific rainstorms, is making the country look more beautiful than ever; the trees and hedges and crops are that lovely green which is one of the beauties of Britain. Visitors to our country always admire the verdure of the British Isles, which, they say, cannot be excelled anywhere. It is often those who live farthest away who see the most of other countries. The inhabitants themselves are unable, either because they have no spare time, or because they cannot afford to leave their own homes.

Where there are children in these poor homes, more particularly homes in the large towns, it is necessary that strangers should make the effort to raise money in order to give them a breath of fresh country air on one day of the year at least. Several Funds have been started for that purpose, but none is so far-reaching in its effects as the Fresh Air Fund, which, during the eleven years it has been in existence, has sent nearly a million children into the country for a day.

Ninepence is all it costs to give one child a whole day's happiness, and I am sure it is not because you grudge giving that sum, but only because you cannot be bothered to get the necessary stamps and send them along that your contribution has not come to hand yet. Go *now* to the nearest post-office and buy as many stamps, or as large a postal order as you can afford, and send them to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. All amounts will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Collecting forms can be had on application.

Your Editor.

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Which Shall It Be?

The Romance of a Singer and a Song.

"This is what I call a pretty state of things!" cried the little manager, dancing excitedly about the floor in order to give vent to his feeling of vexation. "Here have I been preparing Margaret for the grand occasion that will lift her from the ranks of the amateurs to the position of a coming prima donna, I have billed the town for the performance on Thursday—the day after to-morrow!—and now all my plans are to be upset, the public to be fooled, and Margaret's future to be spoilt, simply because some countryman comes along and asks her to marry him! Why on earth didn't he stop on his farm and grow cabbages?"

He stopped in the midst of a whirl near the piano and glared fiercely at the elderly man seated on the music-stool.

"And I suppose you encourage it, eh? You want him to marry her, rob her of her career, and take her away to hoe potatoes on an isolated farm many miles from everywhere?" he asked furiously. "You would like this fellow to take her away at once, and disappoint the public and injure my reputation? I can see you would like it! Oh, it's enough to make a man tear his hair!"

He passed his hands through his bushy hair as if he intended to illustrate his words in a very realistic manner. The elderly man's face was grave; he hesitated before answering, but finally said:

"I do not desire to disappoint the public or to damage your reputation, old friend, but I do hope that Margaret will accept him and that he will decline to allow her to appear on Thursday! I——"

"Listen to that!" cried the manager dramatically, apostrophising nothing in particular. "Did you ever hear anything so insane, so selfish? You old growler," he continued, turning to the other, "you are doing it for your own sake, without thinking of her!"

The elderly man's countenance became a trifle more earnest in expression.

"You are mistaken, Bain," he responded calmly, "mistaken and unjust to me! I am doing this for my granddaughter's sake and without any thought except for her happiness. You know my opinion of a professional career!"

"You failed yourself, Herbert," declared Mr. Bain, a little more kindly, "but that should not blind you to the chances of your granddaughter!"

"The career is full of bitterness and disappointment except for the favoured few who chance to tickle the public fancy or have been gifted with exceptional talent!" said John Herbert bitterly.

"I have experienced all that, and I would spare Margaret! I had her trained for the operatic stage because, after the death of her parents, it was the only thing which circumstances permitted me to do for her!

"I harboured the thought that she would become one of the favoured few—I hugged that notion in order to justify my action in bringing her up to that life which I detested, I suppose! Well, disillusionment has come.

"I recognise that she is little likely to please by her looks and manners only, and I also have sense enough to see that she does not possess great talent! Therefore I would sooner see her married to Mr. Sandeman, and living quietly and happily in a rural district, than undergoing the painful experience which is sure to be hers if she adopts the operatic stage as a method of gaining a livelihood!"

"It's sheer folly!" groaned Mr. Bain, sinking into a chair for a moment and then springing to his feet again. "Sheer folly! Who says she has no talent? Why, she sings divinely."

"She sings the notes very accurately," assented John Herbert, in his usual grave tones, "and she has a good voice, but——" He stopped, as though unwilling to give utterance to the opinion; with an effort he continued: "She sings mechanically. There is no *soul* in it! And that spells failure, Bain!

"In the true singer the words of the song are sung with a something that is not in the written score—a something that can never be put down in black and white and which can never be learnt! It comes of itself. I call it *soul!*"

"Don't agree with a word of what you're saying!" said the excitable Mr. Bain irritably. "I won't believe it! It will come all right. Let her go through Thursday's performance and then see!"

"That is what I am now anxious to avoid!" observed Herbert quietly. "She has a chance of marriage with a man of fair means; he can keep her in comfort, free from the worries of life! If she tastes the strange enchantment of the stage, she may not accept! That is why I hope that she will accept him and that he will persuade her to give up the idea of appearing on Thursday!"

"Listen to me!" cried Bain, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder. "You are a disappointed man; you failed in your musical compositions, failed to attract the public, so you think that everyone else will fail! I say it in all kindness, Herbert, you failed because you did not persevere! You should have stuck doggedly to ballad composition! You would have succeeded in that, but you were not persistent and you aimed at high-class composition for which you were unfitted! I implore you not to spoil Margaret's chance!"

"I have encouraged the visits of this young fellow, whose acquaintance we made accidentally some months ago. Yesterday I received a manly letter from him, saying that he wished to propose marriage to Margaret, and would come to-day for that purpose if I had no objection. I replied that I would welcome him, that I naturally could not answer for Margaret, but that he had my best wishes!"

"H'm!" grunted Bain. "I suppose that means that he knows that Margaret is likely to say 'Yes' to his proposal! I feel as mad as——"

He stopped abruptly as the door opened and the two young people came into the room. They looked radiant, but they showed nothing of the bashfulness which usually distinguishes the newly-engaged couple. Bain formed his own conclusions from this; Sandeman had not been refused, at least, but he had not received a decided affirmative.

There was yet hope that Thursday's performance would not be a fiasco. "I don't believe that Margaret would consent to

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play me such a shabby trick!" he decided as he gazed at the girl.

The young couple formed a striking contrast. Sandeman was tall, strong-looking, sunburnt and healthy; his appearance, although not imposing, made an agreeable impression on strangers. Margaret Bayliss was of medium height, fair of complexion, and with a wealth of golden-tinted hair, a pretty and attractive face and graceful carriage.

Bain's remarks concerning the kind of duty which would fall to her lot if she married Sandeman were, of course, exaggerated as the result of his annoyance, and it was not at all difficult to imagine Margaret as the centre of a happy home circle, with this strong man for a husband.

Both Margaret and Sandeman were somewhat taken aback to find Bain in the room, but they quickly recovered their self-possession. After two or three minutes' conversation, Sandeman took his leave and was accompanied to the door by Herbert.

"You will excuse an old man for being anxious concerning a step which so vitally affects the only relative left to him," said the old man earnestly, as they reached the front door. "I hope that your mission has proved successful!"

"Well Mr. Herbert," replied the other, rather diffidently, "it has not been unsuccessful! Margaret has not given me a decided answer yet; she wishes to think it over, so I have arranged to come again on Friday. I shall come in the evening, so as to give her time to recover from the fatigue of Thursday's ordeal! I am confident of success, though! So, good-bye for the present!"

They parted, and Herbert went slowly back to the room in which he had left his friend and his granddaughter. He was sad at heart; he dreaded the effect of the glamour of the stage on Margaret. If Sandeman had only made up his mind a little sooner!

"Sandeman himself wishes her to go through the performance!" mused Herbert with a touch of bitterness. "It tickles his vanity, the idea that she will be a success, and that he will feel that they are applauding his future wife! Ah, me!"

"I thought you wouldn't fail me!" Bain was saying, as Herbert reappeared. There was a ring of triumph in his voice. "After all my tuition, all my attention and work. Bah! I was foolish to take any notice of your nervous old grandfather!" he added, still speaking to Margaret but turning to John Herbert.

"He isn't old, Mr. Bain!" said the girl, sidling up to Herbert. "His hair is grey, but he is strong and upright, and he can't be so old in years!"

Herbert smiled as he kissed her.

"Oh, well, we won't quarrel over that!" cried the little man, preparing to go. "I can't stop any longer this morning. Don't forget! Dress rehearsal to-morrow! Good-bye! No, I can find my way out alone!"

In less than a minute he was tearing along the street, humming a quick march, oblivious of all about him and walking as if his life depended upon the rapidity with which he could cover the ground.

"So you have not given him a decided answer, Margaret? And you will perform on Thursday evening?" asked Herbert as he seated himself on the music-stool and took up a score. "Oh, there is no need for those pretty blushes! It does not take a man of my years long to learn how the wind blows. And do you think that you will be able to give him an affirmative reply, Margaret?"

He had great difficulty in controlling his eagerness to learn the exact state of her feelings. A troubled look crept into her eyes, but they were lowered, so he did not see it. She went to him and knelt by him, placing her head against his left side so that it was near his heart.

"Would it please you, grandfather?"

"Yes, my child! It would place you beyond all the worries and sorrows of the career which, otherwise, you will follow!"

"But I should not escape trouble by marriage, grandfather. Everyone has to worry and sorrow over something, whatever their walk of life! That is true, is it not? If I escape it in one direction, shall I not meet it in the other?"

Herbert was nonplussed; he could but acknowledge the truth of the simple statement, although he tried to make her understand, in a few words, that she would have less to vex her as the wife of Sandeman than as the struggling artiste. Then he turned the conversation.

"I fear that I shall not be at the dress rehearsal to-morrow, Margaret, so I should like to try that song which you will sing at the beginning of the second act. Ah, here it is! Not much in it, but the composer is a favourite, so it will go well enough on Thursday! Bain was right to make this selection; it gives you a better chance. Let us try it!"

He began and she took it up. At the end of the second verse he discontinued playing.

"You are all right at that; no fear of a breakdown!" he said confidently. Under his breath he concluded: "No soul required for *that*, which is fortunate!"

The dress rehearsal was a success, and Bain looked forward with well-nigh uncontrollable eagerness to Thursday evening. The hours seemed to be weeks, but they dragged their weary length along, and at last the time arrived.

The house, a small one, was packed. It was a novelty; the people knew that Margaret Bayliss had sung at unimportant concerts and had taken part in amateur theatricals, and the fact that the well-known Mr. Bain was to try the experiment of bringing her out in the chief part of an opera excited their curiosity. They assembled in force and waited in expectation; it would be interesting to see how Miss Bayliss would go through it. No one anticipated anything out-of-the-way.

John Herbert and Sandeman occupied a box. Herbert had wished to have a seat in front rather than be at the wings; his crossed hands were twitching nervously as they lay on his knee.

The first act was short, and gave but a poor opportunity for the display of talent; nevertheless, the audience gave Margaret a sympathetic reception and encouraged her by occasional good-natured applause.

Then came the second act. Margaret was discovered alone on the stage when the curtain rose, and, after a short soliloquy, she came to the front for her song. She shot a quick, significant glance at the conductor, who played the opening bars, and——

Herbert looked wonderingly at the figure of his granddaughter. That was not the song which she had practised with him! The music was familiar to him; he slipped into a day-dream, and, leaning forward, remained with closed eyes as Margaret sang.

The song was one that told of the chilliness of autumn and the dreariness of winter, of decay and death; then there followed the awakening of new life in the springtime, and the joy and glory of summer.

The theme was an old one, but the musical setting was such that it afforded splendid scope for what Herbert called "soul." The mournful note of the first two verses, and the glad, triumphant ring of the last two—ah, how magically Margaret rendered them! No expression? Why, her very being seemed to be poured into the song!

It thrilled the audience, imparting to every individual man and woman present a

Which story do you like best? See page 51.

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reciprocal feeling. It was like a flood of magnetism; it came from the singer and filled their own being! Spell-bound, the audience waited till the last triumphant note had died away; then the pent-up feelings were expressed in a deafening round of applause.

"She has scored this time!" cried Sandeman exultantly, looking at the audience as though he would say: "That prize belongs to me!"

He received no reply from Herbert; he saw that his companion was still leaning forward with closed eyes.

"Thank you, I am quite well!" responded Herbert, rousing himself to reply to Sandeman's anxious inquiry. "I was thinking. Encore? No, Margaret cannot give an encore! She would not reach that high level again within two or three minutes, so to give an encore would be to spoil the effect of that song. She is right in not responding!"

The remainder of the opera was an absolute success for Margaret, and when the curtain descended on the last act, Bain was beside himself. He danced about, began to speak but without being able to complete the sentences, and generally behaved more like a candidate for a lunatic asylum than as a sober-minded theatrical manager.

Sandeman was also full of extravagant delight at the success of the girl whom he now confidently expected to possess; it did not occur to him that his chances of winning her might be decreased by her triumph; on the contrary, the desire to have her for his wife, increasing with her success, made him more and more confident of winning her.

John Herbert had remained very silent and meditative during the rest of the performance; he scarcely appeared to follow the course of the opera, but kept his eyes half-closed, and his face preserved its impassive expression all through the final scenes. It was only when the opera was actually over that he aroused himself and prepared to leave the box. On reaching the door he suddenly remembered Sandeman.

"I must go round to Margaret," said Herbert simply, "She will be too excited to see you to-night, and you have promised not to touch upon the other matter till to-morrow. So I will take leave of you here. We shall have the pleasure of a visit from you to-morrow, as arranged?"

"Certainly!" replied Sandeman, looking rather disappointed. "Do not fail to convey to her my sincere congratulations!"

It is doubtful whether John Herbert heard the last words.

He hurried from the box to the back of the stage, where he found his granddaughter and Bain awaiting him. He folded Margaret tightly in his arms and kissed her.

"It was a grand triumph!" he said earnestly. "But why did you risk all by singing *that* song? Why did you not tell me? Where did you practise it? Why——"

"Oh, one question at a time, you misanthrope!" laughed Bain, doing a kind of war dance in the centre of the limited space. "What have you to say about soul now?"

"If I had told you, grandfather, you would never have permitted me to sing it," said Margaret, looking at him with eyes half-filled with tears of happiness.

"When I first found it among your papers, I wanted to try it, but you would not let me, although you declared it to be the best thing you had done. Still, I did try it, and I was so pleased with it that I asked Mr. Bain to put it into the opera. We had to keep it a secret, or you would have prevented it. I think it is splendid, and I cannot understand why you hide it!"

"When I composed that music," said Herbert gravely, "I knew that it was the best thing I had done, and I expected the public to go wild about it. But it was received in absolute silence; it was a failure! I put it aside and determined that it should never be sung again. It was that failure which proved the last straw to me. My ambition was crushed.

"I tried in other ways, but only in a half-hearted style. I have had many disappointments since, but the memory of that has remained while the recollection of others has become dim. Bain, why did you let her risk her success by singing a failure?"

"Nonsense! That song would have been a great one years ago if you had had more go in you and had got it sung once or twice more! You are one of those men who make a hash of their lives by being too thin-skinned, too sensitive. A rebuff practically kills you!

"Look here! I have already had a score of inquiries for the name of the composer and the address of the publisher! You will be famous in your old days! Have I told them your name? Of course! And I'll have it put on the bills for Saturday's performance! You'll be called before the curtain with Margaret, hand-in-hand, you know, and bow——" Here he went through the action of bowing to his own reflection in the mirror, while Margaret laughed joyously.

"Another performance on Saturday?" queried Herbert, drawing a deep breath. "But—but what about marrying Sandeman and giving up the professional career?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" interposed Bain. He was about to continue, but he observed the look on Margaret's countenance and held his peace.

"Oh, grandfather, I can't marry him!" exclaimed Margaret appealingly. "I respect him, but I do not love him! I felt that I did not, could not, love him, and that was why I asked for time to consider. I wanted to make sure that I should not do him and myself a great injustice by marrying him. Now, after this, I know that it would be a cruel wrong!

"Do not urge me to do it, grandfather! I love you, and I owe so much to you that I would do almost anything to please you. I know that you have thought that it would be for the best! But I cannot do it! My whole being throbs with the love of music, and I should be no fitting wife for him!

"I feel now that we are not matched—that we should not make each other happy, and I am sure that you would not wish me to contract a marriage of that kind. And, grandfather, do you really think, after this evening's experience, that I shall be entering upon a life of disappointment if I choose music as a profession?"

There was a moment's pause.

"No, my child!" cried John Herbert at length. "You have conquered and have falsified all my predictions! Go on as you have begun, and I will write to Sandeman. You must marry only when love dictates!"

"What about me?" asked the manager, with a look of injured innocence. "Oh, I don't mean about marrying! I want to know if I am not entitled to some little gratitude for showing you that you still have an opportunity of becoming famous, Herbert? Why, your songs will go like wildfire, and you can go on writing as fast as you like!"

Herbert clasped his old friend's hand in silence; his heart was too full for words.

Sandeman was the only one of the four principal persons in this story who had cause to be sad, but he was of a robust constitution, and he soon recognised the position:

"I wish her all good things!" he muttered. "Perhaps I shall have better luck next time!"

F. Brewster.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
MARY MASON, Lady Maitland's maid.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Gilbert Chase Receives a Shock.

Breakfast at the Manor was a "come as you please" function at any time, and the morning following the *bal masqué* it was even more casually attended than usual. The servants moved about softly, and with awed faces that took their reflection from those of the few people seated at the table, for "Mr. Jack," the future lord of the Manor, lay near unto death; and the doctor's verdict, as he drove away from his morning visit, had been sufficiently grave and evasive to create alarm in the hearts of master and servants alike.

Sir Trevor Maitland drank a cup of coffee, and toyed with some fish on his plate. His genial blue eyes looked worn and hollow, while his face had aged suddenly since the night before.

"Dear Trevor!" said Lady Maitland gently, "try to eat something for my sake. You must not break down, too, dear, because I need you as well, you know!"

"You sat up with Jack all night, did you not, Mother-o'-Pearl?" Muriel interrupted swiftly. "You look ill, too. Let me help you in some way."

Lady Maitland smiled sadly. "It is nothing to me, Muriel, to sit up all night. Besides, I would not care to let anyone else take my place by the dear boy's side. The nurse we have wired for from London will relieve me occasionally."

"But won't you let Ivy help you also?" said the girl quickly; and immediately the words had passed her lips she knew her stepmother was annoyed.

"I do not think it advisable, dear," her ladyship said, quietly. "I think that the boy and girl flirtation that existed between them is at an end," she went on calmly. "Ivy told me as much yesterday; and announced her engagement to Mr. Scarlett."

"Digby Scarlett!" exclaimed Sir Trevor, roused from his apathy. "Well, I cannot say I am sorry; he is a sterling good chap; and I hope little Ivy will find happiness; and—and—my boy"—his voice broke—"will—please God—pull through, and marry happily!"

"Yes," said his wife gently; "I hope so too, Trevor!"

"I have telegraphed for Agnes to return to-night, my dear," continued her husband; "she would not like to be away from us in our trouble."

Lady Maitland was silent. She had been congratulating herself upon her freedom from the vigilant eyes of her husband's elder daughter, who had gone away to spend a few weeks with friends, and now her presence would be doubly distasteful! But aloud she said quietly:

"Naturally, Trevor, she will want to be near her brother. Now I will go back to my post," she went on. "Mason took it for me while I came down."

"Do not wear yourself out, my darling," said Sir Trevor hastily, as his daughter slipped out of the room. "Muriel and Mason had better stay in turns with the lad, till the nurse arrives. You are looking pale and unlike your bonny self!"

He turned to open the door, but his wife came up to him suddenly.

"Trevor," she said earnestly, "you have always found me a good and true wife since we were married, fifteen years ago, haven't you?"

He touched her hair with tender fingers: "Yes, my wife. Since the day I met you in Nice, a sad-eyed girl of twenty, in your widow's weeds, you have been to me the dearest and truest of helpmeets in the world. Dear mother of our child, Woolf! I have been twice blessed in my old age, by such a wife and child; and in my troubles you have drawn nearer to me in spite of the great disparity between our ages, and the girlishness of your beauty."

Lady Maitland sighed softly. "I am glad you have told me that, dear. I have wondered lately whether I might not have failed in some of my duties towards you! Now I must go to Jack," she said; "I do not like to keep away along."

"I will stay here, then," said her husband. "I am expecting a visitor."

Her eyes contracted suddenly, and her lips twitched as she repeated:

"A visitor—who is it?"

Before he could reply, a servant flung open the door, and said:

"If you please, sir, Mr. Chase would like to speak to you urgently!"

"Ah!" breathed his wife, "that is the—the man who found Jack in the spinny last night. I will stay and hear what he has to say," then, turning to the servant, she said: "Show Mr. Chase into the library, Lawson, and also ask Miss Muriel to stay with Mr. Jack until I come."

"But, my dear Pearl," Sir Trevor protested, "this person very probably has something to tell me that you should not hear. It will be painful if he has to inform us that he has caught this woman who shot our poor boy!"

His wife smiled, and placed her hand on his arm. "Very probably he has done so, dear! I should like to learn how he has accomplished it! I will follow you in a few minutes."

When her husband had left the room, she went to the sideboard and poured something into a glass, then drained it quickly.

"Now I shall feel braced up!" she murmured; "my nerves are just a little unstrung. That man can have found nothing—new. Heriot North by this time has burnt what I gave him last night; and the—thing is back in Trevor's drawer in the same condition as I took it. No; there is

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nothing I need fear; and yet——" She bit her lip, and touched a piece of black velvet on her wrist with a thoughtful frown; then, with one brief glance at her reflection in the glass, she turned and left the room.

Outside the library door she paused a moment. The sound of voices reached her—that of her husband, and, in a louder, coarser key, that of the detective.

"Yes, Sir Trevor," he was saying, "I thought it my duty to come to you at once, being the Chief Constable of Melton, and it being found on your grounds; though your family trouble about Mr. Maitland made me hesitate at first to intrude. But I think that the same person who shot your son is concerned in the other."

Lady Maitland turned the handle and walked into the room. Her face was very white, and under her large, languid eyes were faint purple rings. Gilbert Chase looked at her with admiration, as she stood behind Sir Trevor's chair, and bowed to him graciously.

"What is this I hear?" she said in her low voice. "No fresh trouble I sincerely hope, Mr. Chase? Or is it that you have discovered something that will throw light upon the cowardly attack on my step-son?"

"No, your ladyship," he replied gravely; "although I have made a discovery that appears to have some link with the attempt upon Mr. Maitland's life."

She opened her eyes widely: "A link! A discovery! What do you mean, Mr. Chase?"

Sir Trevor raised his hand: "No, my dear. I think it will be better for you to be kept in ignorance of this fresh sensation. You should not be frightened unnecessarily."

Lady Maitland smiled, and placed her white hand on his shoulder caressingly. "I have strong nerves, Trevor, and you must not wrap me in cotton wool always. Besides, I think Mr. Chase had better tell me now; I shall imagine all sorts of things unless I know."

The detective stole a look at Sir Trevor, but he made no sign in response, so he said slowly: "Early this morning, my lady, while searching the spinny round the spot where Mr. Maitland was shot, I stumbled across something that gave me a sudden shock, lying not two hundred yards from where I found Mr. Maitland!"

Sir Trevor's wife pulled a chair forward, the back to the light, and slowly sank into it.

"Yes, Mr. Chase, what was it you found?"

"A man I know well—from a criminal point of view," the detective answered. "I have noticed him hanging round the village inn lately, and intended keeping my eye on him. But now"—and the man shrugged his shoulder—"he is beyond my supervision!"

Lady Maitland leant forward eagerly with parted lips. "Not hurt also, Mr. Chase?" she breathed.

"Hurt? Not quite, your ladyship!" he answered laconically, "but dead as a rat in a trap, that's all! Mike Holland, the old 'lag' is *murdered!*"

"Murdered!" exclaimed Sir Trevor and his wife in one gasp; and from the half-open door there came a stifled cry that chimed with their own, and turned three pairs of startled eyes upon the figure that swayed towards them.

"Murdered! Did you say that—that Mike Holland was murdered last night?" and the girl, standing straight and willowy, with her face drained of all colour, and in her eyes the light of fever raging, sent a strange thrill through Gilbert Chase, the phlegmatic man of law, as he returned her glance with one of interest and curiosity.

"Yes, miss," he said gravely. "I did say that. The man, Mike Holland, has rendered his account in a Higher Court this time."

In the girl's eyes a peculiar gleam shone, and the ashen hue of her face grew even more grey and drawn as she slowly turned her gaze upon the beautiful woman in the chair.

"Do you hear what that man says?" she whispered hoarsely. "He is murdered! murdered! No secret is better kept than that the dead possess! He can't speak now! He—he——" Then her voice suddenly changed to a note of terror, as she continued: "Jack and the other—one—they met, and——" Her speech faltered, and with a low, muffled sound she fell, a huddled-up heap, at the feet of Lady Maitland.

The detective rose as Sir Trevor and his wife bent over the prostrate girl. He was thinking, deeply and swiftly.

"Mr. Chase, may I trouble you to ring the bell? This poor child will be very ill, I fear, under the shock of last night and to-day! Trevor," she turned to her husband who stood by her side, a helpless expression on his pale, worried face, "go, dear, and find Woolf; keep him with you. I dread the boy being similarly frightened in this house of sorrow!"

He obeyed her silently; and, after loosening the unconscious girl's neck-gear and holding some brandy to her lips, Lady Maitland addressed the detective:

"I am sorry this interruption has occurred, Mr. Chase. You must tell Sir Trevor and myself the other particulars of this unfortunate affair later."

The detective bowed.

"If I may say so, your ladyship, I should like a few words with this young lady when she recovers."

"Ah!" And her lips parted in a scarlet line, revealing the tiny white teeth under them. "I am afraid you will be disappointed if you expect any valuable information from this hysterical child. But, of course, that is as you think best; when she is better, which I fear will not be for a day or two, I will send for you." Then she said, a sweet smile curving her mouth, "I do not think you could have rung the right bell, Mr. Chase. One of them is out of order; but if you will be good enough to go to the morning-room and ask my step-daughter, Miss Muriel, to come to me, it may be better than an inquisitive servant in the room!"

When the man had closed the door behind him, Lady Maitland, quickly seizing the right wrist of the unconscious girl on the couch, gave one or two hard pinches on the soft flesh, that, after several repetitions, made an ugly mark, dark and red, then taking from her pocket a blue indelible pencil, she deftly touched the bruise with it.

"That man already has his suspicions roused by this little fool," she thought, "and she must bear the brunt of her own folly! If he wishes to fasten his chain of evidence round any neck, it will be hers!"

In the meantime Gilbert Chase knocked at the door of the morning-room, pointed out by an opportune servant, and, receiving no answer, walked in.

A girl turned quickly and faced him. It was the same brown-eyed and tawny-haired beauty whose description he carried in his pocket. A wave of curiosity swept over the detective. This was, he thought, the sweetheart of Jack Maitland.

"Excuse me, Miss——" he began, "but I am looking for a young lady."

"Yes?" she queried. "Who is it?"

"Lady Maitland asked me to send Miss Muriel to her in the library, as there is a young lady there in a bad faint."

The girl started. "You are quite right," she said quickly. "I am Muriel Maitland!"

"You!" exclaimed the detective, in genuine surprise; "but I thought you were——" He stopped, and covered his confusion by adding, "a visitor at the Manor!"

To himself he was saying, "How did I come to make such a mistake, now? It's thrown me right off my perch! I am certain she was in the window, yet she says quite plainly that she is Miss Maitland. Then who is Ivy Strange?" He caught his breath with a gasp of excitement, as the memory of a willowy figure, with heavy-lidded violet eyes, a mass of sun-kissed hair, and a sweet, tremulous mouth, rose before him.

"By Jupiter!" he murmured, with a thrill, "that is the girl! I see now—clearly, too clearly for my sense of justice. I've made a fool of myself—once, but now will make up for it by being doubly wide-awake!"

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Yet while these thoughts were passing through his mind there was another person more than ever determined to be wide-awake also, and whose cunning and quick wit made her more than a match for the worthy but stolid Gilbert Chase!

When Muriel and her escort entered the library, Lady Maitland gave a sigh of relief. "Ah! I am glad you are here, dear. She is on the point of coming round at last. I will leave you with her now, while I go back to my sick-room. The nurse will not have arrived yet." Then, turning to the detective, she said, in a low aside:

"Wait until she is better before questioning her, although I am convinced the poor child speaks in delirium. I will send for you when I consider her well enough."

He bowed his head gravely. As he left the Manor, and strolled through the grounds to the spinny, he was thinking not about the beauty and youth of Jack Maitland's sweetheart, but of an ugly bruise, faint and blue, on the white flesh of the unconscious girl's right wrist, that had caught his gaze when Lady Maitland had moved from the couch.

He put his hand to his brow, and wiped it; it was damp with a sudden moisture caused by some emotion other than surprise. "If I hadn't the evidence of my own eyes," he muttered, "I should think I was going stark, staring mad!"

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Gilbert Chase Reads a Telegram.

Digby Scarlett glanced round his bachelor room with a quiet smile. His critical sense of the fitness of things was more than satisfied by the tone of deep red of paper and curtains that contrasted vividly against the dark background of the oak sideboard and chairs.

His solitary breakfast-table was dainty with silver and flowers, and as he stirred his coffee, a deep sigh of content rose to his lips, and his eyes lingered thoughtfully on the bright log-fire in the old-fashioned grate.

Presently he rose, and going to an inlaid cabinet in the window, took something out of a drawer, and examined it curiously with a furtive haste, as though he dreaded being seen with it in his hand.

It was an oval-shaped locket of hammered gold, and on one side there was a dirty mark, as though a dark liquid had slowly oozed into the tracery of the gold, leaving an indelible stain.

But it was not the exterior of the locket to which Digby Scarlett's eyes were glued in puzzled thought. It was open, and in one of the two spaces for photographs, was the picture of a young girl; the other space was empty, and the glass was broken, as though the fellow likeness had been roughly taken out.

"It's funny!" he muttered, "that I should have noticed this in time to take it! But what I can't make out is *her* photo in it. I wonder whose was on the other side!" He smiled, and as he replaced it in its hiding-place, murmured: "The boy won't be out of the sick-room—if he ever leaves it—for at least six weeks, and by that time this girl will be mine!"

As he turned away from the cabinet and was slowly choosing a cigar, the door opened, and a trim-looking maid said:

"If you please, sir, a gentleman would like to see you on important business."

Digby Scarlett started slightly, and his upper lip quivered under the long moustache, but he said promptly:

"Show him in here, Wallis; and lower the blind a little; the sun is just a trifle too strong this morning for my eyes."

The maid obeyed, wondering slightly at the weakness of her master's sight that could not stand the strength of a winter sun.

As the visitor entered the room, Digby Scarlett flashed a quick glance at him, and a faint sigh of relief escaped his lips as he noted the quiet-looking man with rather vacant blue eyes, who saluted him respectfully.

"Well," he said shortly, "to whom am I indebted for the honour of this visit? You must be brief, for I am a busy man."

The man flushed slightly, but said civilly: "I am Detective-Sergeant Chase, of Scotland Yard, sir, and my visit to you is to ask you if you can oblige me by telling me the exact time it was that you parted with Mr. Maitland of the Manor, who was shot last night?"

A cynical smile parted the lips of the master of the "Rest."

"That sounds almost as though you were charging me with murder, Mr. Chase," he laughed; "but I can tell you that I did not meet the gentleman after all; we must have missed in the dark. I am not quite accustomed to these woods at night, only having taken up my residence here a short time ago."

"Ah!" said the detective slowly. "Thank you, sir, for explaining the matter. I understood from Mr. Maitland that you and he had an appointment last night, and I thought you might be able to throw some light on the matter."

Digby Scarlett raised his eyes with a sudden surprise. "So this fellow knew of the existence of an appointment," he thought. He must be wary in his replies. Aloud, he said pleasantly:

"After rambling about for a time I turned back, hoping to see Mr. Maitland at the Manor, and was shocked when I heard of his accident. Have you any clue as to the would-be murderer?"

Gilbert Chase twirled his hat with thoughtful fingers before he replied. He was not wholly satisfied that the master of the "Rest" was dealing straightforwardly with him, but until he had some chance of speaking to the boy whose commission he had taken up, there was nothing else to do but take notes of the stray evidence he could collect. And there was one person from whom he trusted to learn much!

He looked up, to meet the inquiring gaze of the master of the "Rest."

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said; "but this is not the time to talk of suspicions. Perhaps you have heard that another discovery was made this morning, not far from the place where Mr. Maitland lay; and I have a fancy that the one is connected with the other in some way."

Digby Scarlett looked interested. "I fancy I did hear something about a body being found," he said carelessly, "but thought my servant was referring to Mr. Maitland. Is there another, then? There seems to be an epidemic!"

"A tramp was murdered last night!" said the detective shortly. "I came across his body in the early hours, while I was searching the spinny for traces of the—the person who shot Mr. Maitland."

"Ah! And you imagine that both the successful and the unsuccessful attempts were made by one and the same person?" queried Digby Scarlett, pushing a box of cigars towards the man and turning to throw some more coal on the fire.

"Well, sir," replied Gilbert Chase, slowly, fingering a choice havana, "I can't say yet. My suspicions were inclined that way half an hour ago, but now I must wait for the inquest that will definitely prove whether the three shots I heard were fired from the same weapon or not!"

"You said 'half an hour ago,'" repeated Digby Scarlett curiously. "Am I to understand that something has occurred to alter your opinion since then?"

Gilbert Chase hesitated. "That is so," he said, after a while. "It is quite within the bounds of possibility for anyone—a woman, for instance—to wish an awkward enemy out of her way; but there is no reason I can conceive that she should want to kill the man whom she knew loved, and was loved by, her."

He bent his eyes upon the cigar he was lighting, but was quick to note the irrepressible start of the man who had resumed his seat in the chair with its back to the light.

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"Good Heavens, man!" Digby Scarlett exclaimed, "you must be mad! Why should she wish that tramp out of the way? She is the——" he stopped suddenly, aware of the mild, blue eyes of the detective searching his face with an innocent expression in their depths.

He fell back with a forced laugh, feeling that he had made an exhibition of himself.

"I don't fancy that I mentioned any particular lady, sir," remarked the man drily.

"You did not," Digby Scarlett admitted, now laughing boisterously; "but with one woman constantly in my mind, I imagine that other people only think of her also."

"Hardly flattering to the lady, in the present case, if I may say so, sir," Gilbert Chase murmured, rising to his feet and taking up his hat. Then he paused and looked again at the man in the chair, and noticed that the slim, well-bred hand holding a cigar, trembled ever so slightly.

"I suppose you hardly remember after all these years, sir," he began tentatively, "the forgery case in which you were the prosecutor?"

For a moment Digby Scarlett's head swam with a sudden, awful thought, that struck a cold chill to the very root of his being. Had his enemy sent this man to track him to his lair? Then the recollection of the broken down derelict of an ex-convict as he had seen him in London, rose before his eyes, and he smiled grimly.

"I remember perfectly," he said quietly. "What of it?"

"Only that I was one of the detectives that arrested the prisoner," said Gilbert Chase. "I knew your name, sir, immediately, because of that old case. Well, I won't detain you any longer, sir," he went on. "Thank you for telling me about your failure to meet Mr. Maitland. It simplifies matters, and brings my inquiry into a closer circle. Good day, sir."

As he left the room Digby Scarlett gazed after him with an ugly scowl. "So you came here to spy round, did you, Mr. Chase? And you imagine it would be a feather in your cap to have the master of the 'Rest' drawn into your net of inquiry. But in spite of my momentary incaution you will fail in bringing anything home to me. And before the boy is able to help you, I will be on my honeymoon with beautiful 'Ivy Strange.' 'Ivy Strange!'" he laughed softly. "Strange—yet *not* Strange!" Then going to the sideboard he poured himself out a glass of neat brandy, which he drank eagerly.

"I have something in that cabinet," he muttered after a while, "that my friend Chase would pay dearly to possess!"

* * * * * *

As he walked in the direction of the "New Age," Gilbert Chase chuckled audibly once or twice. "I fancy you just overdid a little of your unconcern, Mr. Scarlett!" he thought. "You nearly let the cat out of the bag when I laid that little trap for you. I don't think I am far wrong in assuming that you know a great deal more than you pretend, about Mr. Maitland's accident; but I have you under my eye, and there's time enough to let matters develop gradually.

"At present it is Miss Strange to whom I intend to devote my energies. She——" he stopped, and put his hand to his pocket for a match. As he did so, he touched something that arrested the words on his lips and sent a sparkle to his eyes. He drew it out slowly. It was the half-used stump of a cigar that he had picked up when searching round the spot where the fallen man, Mike Holland, had lain.

He examined it afresh, his interest excited by a fresh idea

"Mr. Maitland smoked nothing else but cigarettes," he muttered, "and that poor chap could not run to more than an ounce of 'snout' at the most. No. It's the smoke of a gentleman who can afford to pay a good price for his fancy."

Then, acting upon an incontrollable impulse, Gilbert Chase did a strange thing. He took the cigar from his mouth, and placed instead the half-used stump between his lips, which he lit and puffed silently for a few seconds. Then he took it out, carefully extinguished the light, and returned it to his pocket with a thoughtful smile, as he put the cigar Digby Scarlett had given him back into his mouth.

"As I guessed," he mused, "that stump was the remains of a havana!"

When he reached the "New Age" he went to his room, and opening a small letter-case, took out some pieces of paper that appeared to be the fragments of a letter. He bent over them carefully. The texture of the paper was common, and the few words he could decipher were obviously disguised.

"These don't help much!" he muttered. "Since I picked them up in the spinny that night I have puzzled over them. 'Money,' 'father,' and 'silence,' that's all! But if the girl took the money, what need was there for her to go down as well? There is a lot behind all this, but my only chance is in the girl. Poor Mr Maitland! if he only knew that while he is lying unconscious his sweetheart is being drawn into a net of circumstance, which will take a lot of cleverness to get out of!"

He put the scraps of paper back into his letter-case and locked it up, together with the cigar end. Then closing the door, he turned the key and softly slipped down the narrow stairs into the street, where he nearly collided with a tall, dark man, hurrying in the direction of the village. Gilbert Chase looked after him with a puzzled frown.

"Why, that is the owner of the 'Hollies'!" he muttered; "he looks as though he had seen a ghost! I thought he was such a strong-looking man, too! Probably he is also upset by the sudden collapse of the son and heir of Sir Trevor. He was at the ball, too. In fact, that black-eyed 'Mason' told me he was the most constant visitor at the Manor!"

Spurred by a sudden thought, he followed behind the man who, with downcast face and gaunt eyes, entered the post office, and, going up to the telegraph ledge, wrote and crushed several of the forms before satisfied with his message.

When he had gone, Gilbert Chase went swiftly to the place where the haggard master of the "Hollies" had been standing, and while affecting to write a telegram, he quickly detached the clean half of the sheet of blotting-paper with which the stranger had dried his message.

People who sent telegraphic communications in Melton were few and far between, and the blotting-paper was clear. Gilbert Chase walked some little distance away from the post office; then holding up the page to the light on the reverse side, he read:

"Anxious to leave England. Is post at Bombay still vacant? Will accept if so!"

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

"Do you Remember?"

The windows were darkened, and the shadows fell slantingly on the still face of the boy in the bed. The gentle, low-voiced woman who moved with silent steps towards the fireplace, sent a glance of approval round the room where she was to combat the waters of Death, the waves of which were ebbing near the boy who lay on the edge of the shores of Life.

She had done all there was to be done until the next visit of the doctor, and had seated herself in an armchair by the bed. She was a dark woman, with brown hair streaked plentifully with grey; and harassed lines round eyes and mouth told a story of want and past privations.

A gentle tap at the door disturbed her, and rising quickly, she opened it the breadth of an inch.

"Well," she said, in a whisper, "what's wanted?"

"Lady Maitland told me to tell you that you had better

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have your lunch," said the voice at the door. "I am to sit with my brother till you return."

The woman looked at her visitor with a quick scrutiny that gradually changed to a slight smile as the earnest brown eyes of the girl met her own.

"Very well, miss," she murmured; "if you will sit quiet by the bed and call me if he makes any movement, I will leave you for a moment. My journey yesterday has made me just a little tired by now."

The girl entered the room softly, while the nurse went downstairs into the breakfast-room, where a dainty lunch had been laid for her.

Suddenly, when she was preparing to enjoy her well-earned meal, a voice outside the door made her drop the knife and fork in her hand with a noisy clatter, and clutch the table-cloth with a gesture of fear.

"Nurse Beaumont is having her lunch in here," said the voice; "I will go in and speak to her. Muriel is sitting with Jack now."

"Did you see her arrive yesterday?" asked another voice; this time the gruff one of a man.

"No," continued the first. "I was with Ivy in the library; then I had other things to do, so thought it better to let her get accustomed to her surroundings as there was much to be done. But, come, we will see her together."

The door opened, and the fascinated eyes of the nurse in the chair looked almost fearfully into the face of the tall, beautiful woman who came into the room with slow, graceful steps, followed by an elderly, stout-looking man with white hair.

"Ah! nurse," said her ladyship condescendingly, "how is the patient to-day?"

The dark, nervous eyes of the nurse at the table rested anywhere but on the face of the woman in the doorway. Instead, she glanced over her head at the silent, subdued man standing behind her.

"I—I am not sure until the doctor comes," she said, in a voice scarcely audible; "he had a bad night last night."

With a faint sigh Sir Trevor turned and left the room, and his wife would have followed him, had not the nurse suddenly stretched out her hand, and whispered hoarsely:

"Madam, I must speak to you alone!"

Lady Maitland paused, and threw a glance of haughty surprise at the trembling woman.

"Well," she said, in a low tone, "what is it, nurse?"

For answer, the woman raised her head and gazed eagerly into the calm, disdainful face of the mistress of Maitland Manor.

"Madam," she said, in a strangled tone, "don't you know me? It's seventeen years since we parted, when I took—the baby with me—and—you went on your journey as—Mrs. Vernon."

The woman at the door grasped the back of a chair, and leant forward with an intent expression on her face that gradually changed to one of unwilling conviction.

"You are Alice Mayne, then," she said coldly. "What are you doing under your present name?"

"I married," the woman replied; "then my husband died the following year; and I had a little money, so trained for a nurse. I had no idea when I was coming here that I should meet you—again!"

Lady Maitland's face hardened: "Then forget me, Nurse Beaumont," she said icily. "Mrs. Vernon is dead—only Lady Maitland lives!"

Still the woman prevented her leaving the room by saying, with a furtive glance at the door: "Your ladyship, your ladyship! one word more. I have a confession to make to you about—the baby!"

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

A frown puckered the even brows of Sir Trevor's wife, and she caught her breath with a sudden catch.

"Well," she said shortly. "What can you tell me that I do not know? It died a year after you took it!"

Nurse Beaumont shook her head. "Ah! your ladyship, you were told that; but it was not my fault you were deceived. My husband would not let me keep it, but sent it out to nurse with his sister. She took it to a baby farm, and a year later called for it, and gave it in charge of another woman—cheaper than the farm people. When I wrote and asked her for news of it, she told me it was dead!"

A sigh fluttered to the lips of the beautiful woman who listened to her story with compressed lips. "As it is dead, why worry me with the story now?"

"But I don't know that it is dead!" the nurse whispered; "although I told you what my sister-in-law wrote, believing her; and I sent you, if you remember, the jacket and socks she sent me!"

"What happened to it?" asked Lady Maitland, with quivering lips and steely eyes; "tell me at once!"

"Until just a year or two ago," the woman said, "I believed what my sister-in-law had told me. But when I went to see her on her death-bed, she confessed that she had something on her mind—about—that baby!"

The eyes of the woman compelled her to finish what she had to tell.

"It did not die when she said!" she whispered; "it was stolen, and she was afraid to let me know!"

"That was nearly fifteen years ago," Lady Maitland murmured, with a slight smile. "Probably by this time it really is dead!" Then, turning sharply to the woman, she went on in a low, soft tone: "From henceforth, while you are in this house, you are a stranger to me, and I to you. Never dare to refer to the past again! That is dead to me; quite dead!"

With a cold, stately grace she left the room and made her way slowly to her boudoir.

Some time later, when the nurse was having her tea, Lady Maitland took her place by the sick bed of her step-son. The doctor had been, and said that on no account were the windows to be opened, for the temperature of the room was to be maintained at the same degree until the crisis had been reached. Until then the life of the boy on the bed hung in the balance.

Sir Trevor Maitland's wife stood alone in the room. She had sent Muriel downstairs, and only the unconscious boy and herself were in possession.

As she looked thoughtfully down upon the still figure of her husband's son and heir, a sudden thought flashed into her mind, and she bit her lip in a spasm of fear.

The memory of a soft, sneering voice of two nights before, and two cruel, glittering eyes mocking her with the half-breathed suggestion that the boy—dead, would clear their paths, occurred to her in all its ugly significance, and she shuddered.

She glanced at the window; then back at the bed.

Only the opening of a window! nothing rough or revolting, would be sufficient to make her son Woolf the heir, and pave the way for the enemy to marry that white-faced fool of a girl.

With a swift gesture, and a tightening of the muscles round her mouth, she went to the window and flung it wide open; ignorant of the fact that from behind the heavy curtain of the bed, a young, careworn face, with an irrepressible look of horror in the depths of the wide, burning eyes, was watching her action.

"There!" she murmured, as the cold, damp air of the January afternoon filtered into the room and touched with chilly fingers the loose hair on the fevered brow of the unconscious boy. "No one will know that it was I who opened it!"

When her soft footsteps had died away, a slim figure shot from behind the curtains, and closed the window; then turned to the bed, and bent down over the boy lying there.

"Darling!" she murmured, "I have saved you this time! God grant no fresh attempt may be made! I am going away, my dearest! I cannot stay here; I am afraid! afraid! afraid!"

Her head sank down into the softness of the eiderdown, and the heavy lids closed over the weary eyes that sleep had not visited for many nights.

Time slipped by, and Nurse Beaumont, coming back to her charge, started when she saw a figure, shadowy in the twilight, kneeling by the side of the bed. She bent over it and touched the tangle of bright hair with gentle fingers.

She had already learnt that the girl at the lodge was a foundling.

"Miss!" she said. "Miss!"

Receiving no reply, she lifted the girl, and half-carried her to a couch. With a sympathetic gesture she brushed the curls back from the low brow of the sleeping girl; then a stifled cry rose to her lips, as she bent forward eagerly—yet fearfully—to gaze still closer at a small red mark on the white forehead.

"What is the matter, nurse?" said a soft voice behind her; and turning, she saw Lady Maitland, in a loose, clinging tea-gown, standing at the door.

The woman beckoned to her, silently.

"Your ladyship! Come! Look!" she whispered, pointing to the girl's brow.

"Do you remember *that*!—that mark?"

(Another long instalment next week.)

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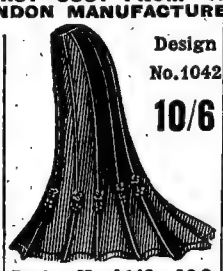

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How the Chain was Forged.

Cumso: "What a sweet wife young Fosdick has. Where did he meet her?" Cawker: "Their chain of matrimony was forged on the golf links."

He's Left in Peace Now.

"My wife never gets me up to cut the grass before breakfast." "Is that so?" "Yes; she tried it once, and I was so sleepy I ran the lawnmower all over her flower-beds."

Nothing New.

He kissed her! She neither drew back nor turned red, And she did not deliver a slap on his ear; he kissed her! No word by the lady was said—She had ceased to be thrilled—they'd been married a year.

It Couldn't Have Been.

"Wretch! There's a letter in your coat pocket I gave you to post three months ago." "It can't be possible, my dear." "Why do you say that?" "Because I'm pretty sure I haven't had that coat more than ten weeks."

The Money was Spent.

Smith (who had forgetfully left his purse on the piano last night): "Have you found anything this morning, Angelina?" Angelina: "Oh, yes, dear! Thanks! I have ordered a new piano stool, some lace curtains, and such a love of a hat!"

Auntie Might Have Guessed.

"But why on earth did you introduce me to your aunt as Mr. Darling? Did you forget that my name was Scroggs?" "Certainly not, you old goose. But I know she overheard me call you 'darling,' and I wouldn't have her think I was spooning for all the world."

Clever Child!

"My youngest child is only eighteen months old," remarked Mr. Snaggs, "yet he can play on the piano." "Oh, what are you giving us?" replied two or three in the crowd. "It's a fact. Just put him on top of the piano, with a few playthings, and he'll play as contentedly as you please for an hour at a time."

His Consolation.

"Why did you invite Bragdon to spend Sunday with you? It nearly broke his heart when Jennie Harkins married you." "I know it. I thought if Bragdon came up and saw how Jennie and her mother rule things in the house over which I am supposed to preside, he'd be rather glad for himself after all."

Such a Thoughtful Wife!

"Mrs. Beasley is always thinking of her husband. She never does anything without considering him." "Well, that's nice of her." "Yes, but it seems to me she overdoes it sometimes. When the men came to paint their house yesterday, she wouldn't let them start until she had selected colours that would harmonise with her husband's new striped shirts."

Married v. Single.

"How many persons can you crowd into a tram?" I asked the conductor. "That depends on whether they are married folk or couples thinking about it," he replied.

Waste Not, Want Not.

"Where's your bottle of cough medicine, Josiah?" "What do you want with it?" "Well, you won't take it, and as it cost ninepence it shan't be wasted. I'm going to polish the piano with it."

No More Ambition.

Opulent Father-in-Law: "What ails you, George? Since you have married you seem to have lost all your ambition." George: "Well, you see, sir, I reached the height of my ambition when I became your son-in-law."

Insomnia an Advantage.

"My husband has a great advantage over most men." "Indeed?" "Yes. He walks in his sleep." "I don't see what advantage that can be to a person." "Why, he can carry the baby all night long and still get his natural rest."

They'd Got Dusty.

"I saw you talking with my cousin just now," she said. "Don't you think he has a wonderful fund of dry humour?" "Yes," he replied, with some misgivings as to whether the fellow really was her cousin, "he has indeed a fund of dry humour; in fact, it's so dry that it's dusty."

A Clever Woman.

"I tell you my wife knows a thing or two. The people who inhabit the neighbourhood into which we have just moved look at us with awe." "How did she manage it?" "Engaged two of the biggest vans in town to move us, when all our goods might have been transported in a greengrocer's cart without overloading it."

Experience is a Hard Mistress.

He quoted the old chestnut. "In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," he said. She sighed and shook her head. "That's the trouble," she replied; "they turn lightly instead of seriously." For she was a girl who had been through several Spring engagements.

A Lesson She Hadn't Learnt.

Dire poverty confronted them. "And there is nothing in the house for dinner?" he whimpered. The young wife burst into tears. "No, and I don't know how to get breakfast and lunch except with what is left over from dinner!" she sobbed. In this terrible moment her cooking class certificate, looking down at them from its gilded frame, seemed almost to mock them.

She Won the Bet.

Fred Flasher and Miss Florentia Flounce were discussing the mental power of controlling thought. Said Flasher: "I will give you a pair of gloves if you can think of positively nothing for five minutes, and still be awake." "Done," she responded. Five minutes passed. "I've won the gloves," she exclaimed. "How did you manage to think of nothing for the whole five minutes?" he asked eagerly. "I fastened my mind on your moustache, and kept it there," she replied triumphantly. The referee awarded her the gloves.

Almost Unnerved Her.

Marie: "Maud and I were in town yesterday, and as we were walking along one of the streets we looked up and saw some men on a ladder, painting a building. They must have been at least fifty feet above the ground, and all of a sudden one of them slipped and almost fell. I was terribly shocked." Harry: "I'm not surprised at that. I suppose in your mind's eye you could see the poor fellow shooting down through the air, even though he succeeded in saving himself?" Marie: "Oh, it wasn't that. In his awkward clutch at something he upset his paint, and a big splotch of it came right down on my new Spring hat. Did you ever hear of anyone who had such luck as I have?"

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Early Morning Catarrh.

In an editorial on Catarrh in the last number of the *Review of Nose and Throat Diseases*, there is mentioned the tendency of catarrhal diseases to become especially troublesome in the morning. The explanation of this is to be found in the fact that during the night when the body is recumbent, the catarrhal accumulations pass backward from the nasal cavities into the throat. In the morning, on waking, these accumulations cause hacking, coughing, or scraping to free the throat from the phlegm. Nearly all those who suffer from nasal complaints have this symptom, and in some cases it becomes so prominent as to be called "Early morning catarrh." This number of the *Review* also contains a "Supplement" giving the details of a large number of cases of catarrh cured by a new method, which has been successful where operative procedures and cauterisations have failed. There is, likewise, a Report Form, by means of which patients suffering with deafness, or ear, nose, or throat ailments can obtain free advice by post. Those who are interested can secure a copy of the *Review* (with supplement and report form), free by post, by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10, Marble Arch, London, W. When possible, however, the editor advises patients to have a consultation with the medical staff at the Drouet Institute. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Husband's and Holidays.

THE holiday season always brings with it a group of problems for lovers. "J. H. J." writes as follows:—"A young couple have not long been married. The husband proposes he shall spend his holiday by himself. Should this be so?"

* * * * *

This question was discussed in *Pearson's Weekly* last year, and good reasons were given on both sides as to whether or not a husband should spend his holiday alone. It is, of course, a matter of opinion. For my part, I think certainly a man and his wife should go away together, especially if newly married. It would be a sorry state of affairs if a man only expects his wife to be his helpmeet in working days, and in the drudgery of a household, and not to share with him the pleasures of the seaside or country.

* * * * *

On the other hand, I believe many married men do gain advantage from a trip with a few other men friends. It must depend on circumstances. If the wife has somewhere to go where she herself will have a good time—say to her own home—it might be a good plan for her husband to go somewhere on his own. But on no account should a wife be left at home to mind a house if her husband is able to give her the change which she needs as much as he does.

Marriage on a Small Income.

"DIFFICULTY" (aged twenty) is attached to a lady five years older than himself. He earns 25s. a week, with the prospect of double in three or four years' time. She earns £2 a week, but supports her widowed mother and family from it. Should he start courting her now, and if so, how?

* * * * *

You will not be in a position to marry for three or four years. That would not be so unfortunate under other circumstances, but seeing that your friend is in business, and that several lives are dependent on her efforts, I fear you would be doing ill in entertaining any ideas of marriage. In the first instance, your wife would have to throw up her business engagement, or neglect your household. If she did the former, the responsibility of her helpless relations must fall on you, which you could ill afford.

* * * * *

There is no harm, however, in telling the girl the facts of the case; if she is willing to have a long courtship, well and good, though, at the same time, I should not advise it. And if she continued in business, you would have rather a rough time of it at home. A woman cannot work all day, and then turn to household duties without serious danger to her health, to say nothing of her happiness. Unless your business prospects look up very considerably within the next few years, I fear you would be encountering great trouble for both yourself and the girl by marriage under present circumstances.

A Change of Lovers.

"MAY" used to "keep company" with a young man, who, after ten months' friendship, went to live in another county. During his absence "MAY" got to know another man, whom she saw every day, and grew fond of. She is now engaged to him, but her parents much prefer the original man. What is she to do to make peace at home?

* * * * *

If you sincerely love the second man, you must not think of any but him. Your parents may be right in liking the first one best, but after all, it is not for them to say which of them you should love. No doubt when your parents know your present sweetheart better, they will like him as well.

Putting on "Sea-Side."

WHILE at the seaside "G. H." met a young lady. In conversation he gave her to understand that he was in a very much better position than he really is. He grew fond of her, and now loves her. How can he break the truth to her as to his position?

* * * * *

A very pertinent question. Young men are rather too fond of "putting on sea-side," not realising that it will sooner or later find them out. You must, of course, either tell the girl straight out what is your position before carrying matters further, or set to work to place yourself in a better one, hoping that time will convert your untruth into a truth.

Too Forward at Seventeen.

"AMETHYST."—I am glad you like *Short Stories*, and have got your friends to take it in. As to the young lady typine next door to whom you would like an introduction, it would certainly be better to try to get to know her privately than in her business capacity. No doubt both her employers and yours would not much care for any intimacy between you during business hours, especially as you are only seventeen.

* * * * *

You say you have only left school two months. Well, is it not rather early for you to start courtship with a girl unknown to your friends? I have every sympathy with genuine love affairs between boys and girls, but I cannot encourage you in what seems nothing more than curiosity. I should recommend you to spend your time trying to improve your business position, and by taking exercise in your spare hours. You have plenty of time in the future for love-making, which is, after all, not the only thing in life—certainly not at seventeen.

In Love with Another's Girl.

"LANCELOT" is sorely troubled. He has never been in love until now, and this time it is with a girl who can never be his wife, for she is engaged to another. Some weeks ago, his cousin came up and announced that he was engaged. The cousin, by the way, was to "LANCELOT'S" mind quite an unattractive man.

* * * * *

The other day "LANCELOT" met him and his sweetheart, and in one glance fell desperately in love, and if there is a language of eyes, he read the same message in the girl's eyes towards himself. He has since met the couple frequently, and his feeling for the girl has deepened. He believes she does not care for the man she is engaged to, but does care for himself. What should be done?

* * * * *

Avoid seeing the girl by every means in your power. She belongs to another, and it is not for you to disturb your cousin's happiness by imaginary ideas of your own. The commandment against stealing applies to hearts as well as inanimate things, and to draw a girl away from the man she is engaged to is a form of theft.

Cynthia

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